

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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## BIDEN SPEECH TO FOCUS ON ECONOMY

USW's headquarters, city to serve as backdrop for stop on president's Pa. tour

By Jonathan D. Salant  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden heads to Pittsburgh on Wednesday, the middle stop on his three-day pre-primary tour across the nation's most populous swing state.

Mr. Biden will speak at the headquarters of the United Steelworkers union, which endorsed the president last month.

The president last month sided with the steelworkers and said it was "vital"



for U.S. Steel to remain "domestically owned and operated." That followed the announcement that a Japanese corporation, Nippon Steel Corp., had agreed to buy the iconic American company. U.S. Steel shareholders approved the deal earlier this month.

The administration on April 10 announced new steps to prevent China from dumping below-cost steel into the United States, including tripling tariffs and seeking an investigation by the U.S. trade representative.

SEE **BIDEN**, PAGE A-11



Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP via Getty Images

President Joe Biden speaks during a campaign event at the Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple in Scranton on Tuesday. Mr. Biden visits Pittsburgh on Wednesday.

## U.S. limits mining dust

Protections announced as black lung surges

By Michael Korsh  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
Phillip Powell and Yiqing Wang  
Medill Investigative Lab

Federal regulators on Tuesday unveiled one of the most sweeping safety reforms in American coal mining in decades after long debate over the plan that's designed to protect the next generation of miners from one of the industry's most insidious diseases.

The new rule by the Mine Safety and Health Administration cuts the exposure limit for crystalline silica — a residue from quartz that experts say can be even more deadly than coal dust — by half, from the initial level set by the agency more than a half century ago.

As younger miners dig deeper into quartz rock, the carcinogen has caused a new spike in black lung cases, as well as a variation of the disease known as silicosis, health experts say, prompting the

SEE **COAL**, PAGE A-2

## RECOVERY MISSION



Benjamin B. Braun/Post-Gazette

Tow boats and workers tend to a partially submerged barge near the Emsworth Locks and Dams on Tuesday. Recovery of some of the 26 barges that broke loose during the weekend continues to keep a stretch of the Ohio River closed to maritime traffic. **Story, Page A-10**

## Steelworkers seek leads, options at Weirton job fair

Impending mill closure creates uncertainty

By Evan Robinson-Johnson  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WEIRTON, W.Va. — After four generations in the steel industry, Josh Martin thinks it might finally be time for his family to get out.

"Up to this point, it's provided a great life for me, my parents and my grandparents," the 28-year-old steelworker said. "But now it

seems like every two years something's closing."

In the two months since steel-maker Cleveland-Cliffs announced it was idling the tinplate mill here and laying off up to 900 workers, some have managed to find other employment. But many, like Mr. Martin, are still looking.

The layoffs are expected to take effect Friday after the United Steelworkers union negotiated a slight delay. Local USW chief Mark Glyptis said he tried to get Cliffs to

SEE **CLOSURE**, PAGE A-2



Lucy Schaly/Post-Gazette

Howard Patterson of Washington Tool & Machine Co. in Washington, Pa., far left, and Alex Sanders talk to workers from the Cleveland-Cliffs tin mill in Weirton, W.Va., who will be laid off starting Friday. More than 300 workers attended a job fair at the Thomas E. Millsop Community Center in Weirton on Tuesday.

## Airbnb shooting remains unsolved

Much unknown 2 years after North Side incident

By Megan Guza  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Two years after two teenage boys were killed in a mass shooting at a house party in a North Side Airbnb, information and answers remain hard to come by.

### INSIDE

Legislation to regulate short-term rentals remains in limbo, **A-8**

The early morning shooting on April 17, 2022, killed Jaiden Brown and Matthew Steffy-Ross, both 17. Nine other people were wounded by gunfire and others were hurt jumping from second-story windows to escape the shooting.

Investigators have estimated some 200 people were at the party, some of them young adults and many teenagers. Police have said around 100 rounds were fired inside and outside of the Suismon

SEE **AIRBNB**, PAGE A-9



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### Weather

Warm with morning rain.  
Daytime high, 74;  
tonight's low, 55.  
**Page B-6**

Bridge ..... **B-4**  
Business ..... **A-14**  
Classified ..... **B-5**  
Comics ..... **B-3**  
Crosswords ..... **B-4**

Editorials ..... **A-16**  
High Schools ..... **C-8**  
Horoscope ..... **B-4**  
Local News ..... **A-10**  
Lottery ..... **A-10**

Magazine ..... **B-1**  
Obituaries ..... **A-12**  
Scoreboard ..... **C-7**  
Sports ..... **C-1**  
Television ..... **B-2**



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# Coal miners get new protections from silica dust

COAL, FROM A-1

agency to look for ways to stem what has been one of the industry's most persistent dangers. The Labor Department estimates the rule will save more than 1,000 lives and prevent more than 3,700 cases of silica-related illness.

"It is unconscionable that our nation's miners have worked without adequate protection from silica dust despite it being a known health hazard for decades," said Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su in a statement Tuesday.

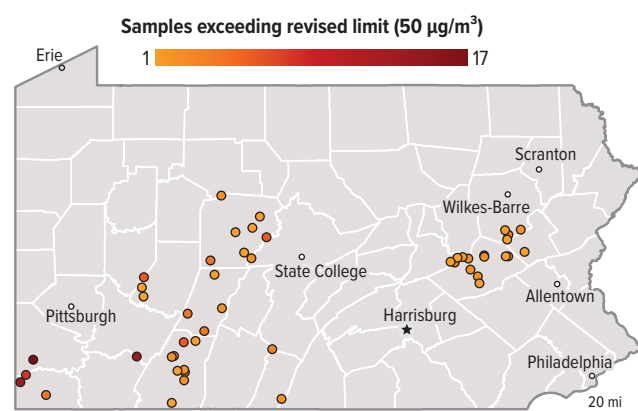
After announcing the new regulation at a United Mine Workers of America event in Uniontown on Tuesday, federal officials toured Lungs at Work, a black lung clinic in Washington County. There, Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health Chris Williamson spoke to clinic employees and former coal miners about the hazards posed by silica dust and explained critical provisions in the new rule that he said will empower the agency to safeguard miners.

"All of this is entirely preventable — and that's the role we play," Mr. Williamson said.

Pennsylvania is the third-largest coal producing state in the U.S., and implementing the agency's expansive reforms is expected to create significant challenges for operators in Western Pennsylvania, where coal remains a

## Pennsylvania's mine hazards

More than 48 mines in Pennsylvania — mostly in the state's western portion — showed quartz concentrations above the federal government's new safety levels of 50 micrograms per cubic meter in the past five years.



Source: Mining Safety and Health Administration, Mine Data Retrieval System

Research: Michael Korsh  
Graphic: Ed Yozwick/Post-Gazette

bedrock of the local economy.

The new rule comes amid growing debate among trade groups representing the mining industry, with many raising concerns about the costs and the ability of mine operators to quickly adapt to the changes.

At the heart of industry criticism is proposed enforcement measures to ensure that operators abide by the revised silica standard.

Under the new rule, mine operators will have to implement new engineering and administrative measures to limit miners' exposure from 100 micrograms

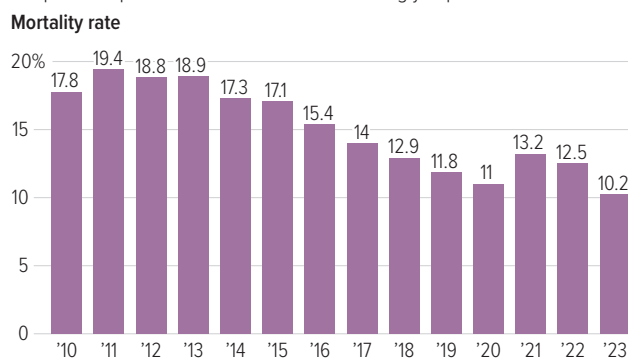
per cubic meter to 50 for most mines, which would include improved ways to capture the dust, improve ventilation systems and collect samples.

Federal regulators estimate these controls could cost the mining sector at large more than \$89 million a year, with some industry representatives claiming the sampling alone can amount to over \$100,000 per mine.

Michele Brant, the wife of a coal miner in Somerset County for 35 years, said she was skeptical about the industry's willingness to put forth resources and implement new controls in order

## Black lung mortality rates

After years of declines in the rate of black lung disease, a more severe form of the disease — silicosis — has emerged, as younger miners dig deeper into quartz rock and become increasingly exposed to silica dust.



to conform with the new regulations.

"It's a very well laid-out plan, but it's not going to work," Ms. Brant said at the Lungs at Work event. "You're fighting a system."

Industry groups said the agency should allow for some compromises that would allow miners to work in areas that exceed dust sample limits by wearing personal protective equipment, such as a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR), as part of a "hierarchy of controls."

The Pennsylvania Coal Alliance, the state's foremost industry trade group, said advocates proposing the new rule may not have accounted for "significant technological advance-

ments" before carrying out research that foreshadowed a rise in silicosis.

The PCA also pushed back on longstanding allegations of coal operators manipulating the samples collected to conceal high levels of dust from regulators. Two years ago, two former mine managers in Kentucky faced criminal convictions for removing dust-sampling devices from miners before the end of the designated sampling period.

"The PCA does not believe that dishonest sampling is widespread and, frankly, as an industry, we are weary of the constant accusations that are absent of evidence," the trade group said in its public letter.

But even industry heavy-

weights like the National Mining Association have stood behind the agency's marquee proposal: a dramatic reduction in silica levels.

The national trade group said it agreed reducing silica levels "to the lowest reasonably practicable level" could benefit both miners and operators, if the agency also allowed for remediation such as respiratory protection in the case of elevated levels.

Mining safety advocates, on the other hand, hailed the lowering of the permissible silica standard from its initial level — first set in 1969 — but cautioned that the regulations were not stringent enough to fully protect miners from the deadly disease.

Judy Holliday, whose husband died in 2019 after a battle with black lung, said the decadeslong battle for coal mining reform has been rife with outsider influence, from powerful trade groups to influential politicians.

"It's a delicate balance of egos," said Ms. Holliday, of Indiana, Pa. "You get one group that might get their nose out of a joint for the most minimal thing, and it can just completely decimate the entire action that should go through."

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# Employers head to Weirton to attract laid-off workers

CLOSURE, FROM A-1

stagger the mill shutdown so that it could potentially reopen down the line.

Most workers aren't banking on that hope. On Tuesday, they packed into the community center in Weirton for a job fair in search of other options. Mr. Martin was considering a role with the state transportation department.

"There's always going to be bridges to inspect," he said.

Others have chosen to transfer to other Cliffs locations across the country.

Justin Best, 38, is trying to sell his house to support a move to Cleveland. Fortunately, he said, his 4-year-old son hasn't yet started school.

Robbie James, 31, is headed to Butler, grateful that a federal rule was tweaked this month to protect the Pennsylvania electrical steel mill there.

Dan Strapazzon, 41, who has spent his last eight years at Cliffs as a crane operator, isn't sure what's next.

"It's a tough situation," he said. "We're used to working locally and making a decent

wage. Everything [else] around here is a 40% pay cut."

Workers said they made more than \$40 per hour at Cliffs, with robust health benefits.

In February, Cliffs blamed the shutdown on tariffs, saying a decision from the U.S. International Trade Commission not to tax tin from Canada, China, Germany and South Korea, made it "impossible" to continue making tinplate. Customers, including the can maker for Campbell's Soup, planned to use cheaper alternatives to what Cliffs produced, Mr. Glyptis said.

The closure is expected to curb tax funding for city services and will likely have ripple effects throughout supporting businesses in the area.

Employers looking to attract Cliffs' talent Tuesday included Republic Services, a garbage collection company based in Wheeling, W.Va.; Union Electric Steel out of Carnegie, Pa., and Nucor Steel, the largest steelmaker in the country, which is opening up a sheet steel



Lucy Shaly/Post-Gazette photos



**Above:** Cleveland-Cliffs plans to shut down its Weirton, W.Va., tinplate mill indefinitely and lay off 900 workers. More than 300 workers lined up for a job fair at the Thomas E. Millsop Community Center on Tuesday.

**Left:** David Wilkinson, human resources and employee relations manager at American Consolidated Resources in St. Clairsville, Ohio, said he hoped to hire 60 workers at the event.

mill in Mason County, West Virginia.

Nucor's hot mill Manager Chris Backel, who grew up in Weirton, acknowledged the new operation would force folks to relocate — it's about a 3½-hour drive. But the work and pay are similar, and they're looking to hire for 200 positions this year.

He had an optimistic message for anyone concerned about the future of domestic steel production.

"This industry is as strong as it's been in decades," Mr. Backel said. "We wouldn't be investing \$3.1 billion [in Mason County] if we didn't think so."

Isaac Evans, training director for Ohio's Plumbers and Pipefitters union, said some workers have had to learn new skills to stay employed.

"It makes me nervous to see these plants shut down, but at least we have something new that's starting," he said, citing a battery manufacturing center currently under construction in Weirton.

Built by Massachusetts-based Form Energy, the factory already has a sweeping, modern glass facade, and plans to employ up to 750 local workers. It was built on the same land that once supported a sprawling Weirton Steel operation.

*Evan Robinson-Johnson: ejohnson@post-gazette.com and @sightsonwheels*

## Corrections & clarifications

If you have a correction and cannot reach the responsible reporter or editor, please call the office of Stan Wischnowski, executive editor, at 412-263-1890.

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## ALMANAC

### On this day, April 17

**1961** Some 1,500 CIA-trained Cuban exiles launched the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in an attempt to topple Fidel Castro, whose forces crushed the incursion by the third day.

**1964** Ford Motor Co. unveiled the Mustang at the New York World's Fair.

**1969** A jury in Los Angeles convicted Sirhan Sirhan of assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

**1970** Apollo 13 astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert splashed down safely in the Pacific, four days after a ruptured oxygen tank crippled their spacecraft while en route to the moon.

**1972** The Boston Marathon allowed women to compete for the first time; Nina Kuscsik was the first officially recognized women's champion, with a time of 3:10:26.

**1973** Federal Express (later FedEx) began

operations as 14 planes carrying 186 packages took off from Memphis International Airport, bound for 25 U.S. cities.

**1975** Cambodia's five-year war ended as the capital Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, which instituted brutal, radical policies that claimed an estimated 1.7 million lives until the regime was overthrown in 1979.

**1991** The Dow Jones industrial average closed above 3,000 for the first time, ending the day at 3,004.46, up 17.58.

**1993** A federal jury in Los Angeles convicted two former police officers of violating the civil rights of beaten motorist Rodney King; two other officers were acquitted.

**2012** Riding on the back of a 747 jet, retired space shuttle Discovery traveled from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to Chantilly, Va., to be installed in its new home: the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum

annex in Virginia.

**2022** Ukrainian fighters holed up in a steel plant in the last known pocket of resistance inside the shattered city of Mariupol ignored a surrender-or-die ultimatum from the Russians and continued to hold out against the capture of the strategically vital port.

**Today's birthdays:** Actor David Bradley, 82. Composer-musician Jan Hammer, 76. Actor Olivia Hussey, 73. Actor Clarke Peters, 72. Rapper Afrika Bambaataa, 67. Actor Sean Bean, 65. Former NFL quarterback Boomer Esiason, 63. Actor Joel Murray, 62. Actor Lela Rochon, 60. Actor William Mapother, 59. Actor Leslie Bega, 57. Actor Henry Ian Cusick, 57. Actor Kimberly Elise, 57. Singer Liz Phair, 57. Director/producer Adam McKay, 56. Rapper-actor Redman, 54. Actor Jennifer Garner, 52. Singer Victoria Beckham, 50. Actor-singer Lindsay Korman, 46. Actor Rooney Mara, 39.

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