Toolbox Talk: Highwall Safety

Introduction:
Highwalls are a constant part of surface mining operations, but they also pose one of the greatest risks to miners working near them. Ground conditions can change quickly, especially with weather, blasting, or equipment vibrations. A highwall that looks stable can still fail without warning. Understanding the hazards and applying safe work practices is key to preventing accidents.

Discussion Points:

Recognize Instability:
- Watch for warning signs such as cracks at the top of the highwall, loose material at the base, water seepage, or bulging in the wall. These can indicate that a failure is likely.

Maintain Safe Distances:
- Never work or park equipment directly at the toe or edge of a highwall unless it is necessary and approved. Always give yourself a safety buffer when possible.

Weather Impacts:
- Rain, freezing and thawing cycles, and wind erosion all weaken highwalls. Conditions should be reassessed after storms or temperature changes.

Controlled Access:
- Only authorized personnel should be near highwalls. Barriers, berms, or signage should be used to prevent accidental entry into hazardous zones.

Communication:
- Operators, spotters, and ground personnel must stay in constant communication when working near highwalls. Clear communication helps ensure everyone knows where it is safe to be.

Daily Inspections:
- Highwalls should be examined every shift by a competent person. Document any hazards found and take corrective action immediately.

Closing Message
Highwalls don't give second chances. A single collapse can be fatal and may also damage equipment or cut off escape routes. By staying alert, recognizing hazards, and respecting safe distances, we protect ourselves and our team.

Takeaway Question to Ask the Crew:
What are some warning signs of a highwall failure, and how do we respond if we see them?