

raised with respect to the claim. The conference proceedings shall not be stenographically reported and sworn testimony shall not be taken. Any conference conducted pursuant to this paragraph shall be held no later than 90 days after the conclusion of the period permitted by § 725.410(b) of this part for the submission of evidence, unless one of the parties requests that the time period be extended for good cause shown. If the district director is unable to hold the conference within the time period permitted by this paragraph, he shall proceed to issue a proposed decision and order under § 725.418 of this part.

(b) The district director shall notify the parties of a definite time and place for the conference. The district director shall advise the parties that they have a right to representation at the conference, by an attorney or a lay representative, and that no conference shall take place unless the parties are represented. A coal mine operator which is self-insured, or which is covered by a policy of insurance for the claim for which a conference is scheduled, shall be deemed to be represented. The notification shall set forth the specific reasons why the district director believes that a conference will assist in the voluntary resolution of any issue raised with respect to the claim. No sanction may be imposed under paragraph (c) of this section unless the record contains a notification that meets the requirements of this section. The district director may in his or her discretion, or on the motion of any party, cancel a conference or allow any or all of the parties to participate by telephone.

(c) The unexcused failure of any party to appear at an informal conference shall be grounds for the imposition of sanctions. If the claimant fails to appear, the district director may take such steps as are authorized by § 725.409(b)(2) to deny the claim by reason of abandonment. If the responsible operator fails to appear, it shall be deemed to have waived its right to contest its potential liability for an award of benefits and, in the discretion of the district director, its right to contest any issue related to the claimant's eligibility.

(d) Any representative of an operator, of an operator's insurance carrier, or of a claimant, authorized to represent such party in accordance with paragraph (b), shall be deemed to have sufficient authority to stipulate facts or issues or agree to a final disposition of the claim.

(e) Procedures to be followed at a conference shall be within the discretion of the district director.

**§ 725.417 Action at the conclusion of conference.**

(a) At the conclusion of a conference, the district director shall prepare a stipulation of contested and uncontested issues which shall be signed by the parties and the district director. If a hearing is conducted with respect to the claim, this stipulation shall be submitted to the Office of Administrative Law Judges and placed in the claim record.

(b) In appropriate cases, the district director may permit a reasonable time for the submission of additional evidence following a conference, provided that such evidence does not exceed the limits set forth in § 725.414. The district director may also notify additional operators of their potential liability pursuant to § 725.407, or issue another schedule for the submission of additional evidence pursuant to § 725.410, designating another potentially liable operator as the responsible operator liable for the payment of benefits, in order to allow that operator an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to its liability for benefits as well as the claimant's eligibility for benefits.

(c) Within 20 days after the termination of all conference proceedings, the district director shall prepare and send to the parties a proposed decision and order pursuant to § 725.418 of this part.

**§ 725.418 Proposed decision and order.**

(a) Within 20 days after the termination of all informal conference proceedings, or, if no informal conference is held, at the conclusion of the period permitted by § 725.410(b) for the submission of evidence, the district director shall issue a proposed decision and order. A proposed decision and order is