



Lead Lines



Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter
International Society of Explosives Engineers
www.easternpaisee.com

Volume 33 Number 1

Winter 2026

The Eastern PA ISEE welcomes requests for topics, and invites readers' letters and other contributions that relate to drilling, blasting, seismology and explosives engineering.

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Joint Chapter Meeting with the Penn State Student Chapter

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Penn State University Campus
Hosler Building, Room 157

Or via Zoom

6:00 - 8:00pm

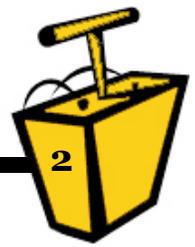
Guest Speakers

Christopher D Catalano
Department of Environmental Protection

Douglas Rudenko, PG
Vibra-Tech Engineers, Inc.

Please RSVP to Dan Leach
717.574.4024 or danleach58@gmail.com

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Our Chapter Mission Statement

Maintain and promote the highest competency standards, safety, and education for drilling, blasting, seismology and explosives engineer professionals.

Letter from The President

Dear Members,

The Board of Directors for the Eastern PA Chapter ISEE met in mid-February and I am excited to share some upcoming events we have planned for our members.

On March 31st we will have a Joint Chapter meeting with the Penn State Student Chapter. This is a great opportunity for us to connect with the next generation of industry leaders so I encourage all members to consider attending. Details about this upcoming meeting can be found on page 1 and 6.

The other events on our schedule include:

- Member Appreciation Baseball Game at the Iron Pigs - May 7, 2026
- 2026 Blasters Training - Summer 2026 (details available soon)
- 10th Annual Clay Shoot & BBQ - November 13, 2026

We hope to see you out at some of these upcoming events.

Best regards,

Ron Eichler

Tom Shaver
Vice President

540-839-9147
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James M. Miller
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(724) 388-7505 cell

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ISEE Conference in Reno, NV

The 52nd Annual ISEE Conference on Explosives & Blasting Technique was held January 20–25, 2026, in Reno, Nevada. Almost 1500 industry professionals attended this year's conference.

Attendees participated in two full days of blasters training, the Seismograph Operators Certificate Program, and over 90 technical and poster sessions, exploring the latest innovations in explosives engineering. The conference also featured social events including the Opening Session, the All Clear Cheers & Beers Bash, complete with the video round-up recognizing the work of blasters and drillers in the field, Untold Stories, the Industry Connection Event, the first-ever ISEE Members-Only Day Party, and a Spouse Program with engaging activities for family members.

During the Chapter Management Workshop our Chapter received the Chapter Quality Operations Award and the Chapter Service Award.

Pictured is Doug Rudenko accepting the awards on behalf of the Eastern PA Chapter.



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Clay Shoot & BBQ

On October 24, 2025, the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter hosted its 9th Annual Clay Shoot and BBQ at the Lehigh Valley Sporting Clays facility in Allentown, PA. The event took place at a former quarry site, featuring ponds and historic limestone structures that provided a challenging and scenic course.

Participants were treated to a delicious BBQ lunch before heading out on the course. A total of 52 members attended, including 48 shooters who competed. The top three shooters were awarded as were the Lewis Class winners. A special prize was awarded to the top scoring team and the lowest scoring team. Two stations on the course featured green birds and participants who shot those got additional prizes. Raffle prizes were awarded following the shoot and the winner of the Franchi Instinct L Over/Under shotgun raffle was announced.



Winners:

1st Place: Isaac Bitner – East West Drilling

2nd Place: Nate Schultz – American Rock
Mechanics LLC

3rd Place: Kelly Vietor – Maxam N.A.

Lewis Class Winners:

Class A: Joe McKenzie – Center Rock, Inc.

Class B: Matt Steinmetz – Valley Rock Solutions
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Class C: J. Kenneth Steinmetz – Valley Rock
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Shotgun Raffle Winner: Brad Blanner



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Shotgun by Rocky Rift Consulting

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Clay Shoot & BBQ



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Joint Chapter Meeting - March 31st at PSU

On Tuesday, March 31, 2026 the Eastern PA Chapter and the Penn State Student Chapter will host a Joint Chapter Meeting from 6:00pm – 8:00pm. The meeting will take place on the Penn State University Campus in the Hosler Building, Room 157 or via Zoom at <https://psu.zoom.us/j/8593339892?omn=91715351257>.

Our guest speakers include Christopher D Catalano, Chief of the Explosives and Safety Section in the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Bureau of Mining Programs who will present, "Eating Regulatory Marble Cake: An Overview of Regulatory Agencies." Also presenting is Douglas Rudenko, P.G., Senior Vice President of Vibra-Tech Engineers, Inc. who will present, "Tools for Community Concerns."

Members of the Eastern PA Chapter are encouraged to attend in person or via Zoom for an educational discussion and networking opportunities with the Penn State Student Chapter.

Please RSVP to Dan Leach via phone at 717.574.4024 or danleach58@gmail.com.



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Drilling & Blasting Coordinator

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21st Pennsylvania Drilling and Blasting Conference Held

On November 13 and 14, 2025, the 21st Pennsylvania Drilling and Blasting Conference was held at The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, Pennsylvania.

The conference is hosted for underground and surface blasters, engineers, suppliers, and other professionals associated with drilling, blasting, and explosives. This year's conference involved over 400 people, 47 exhibit booths, 4 outdoor drill exhibits, and 20 corporate sponsors.



The conference program committee, comprised of university faculty, staff, and industry leaders, developed a program that highlighted a varied and impressive list of 25 speakers. The conference included two breakout sessions focused on relevant real-world practices and concepts in drilling and underground, plus a breakout session about the New York State blaster training requirements.



Continued on page 8

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PA Blasting Conference Continued

Jeff Hermanson, one of the primary mountain carvers of the Crazy Horse Memorial, was the keynote speaker. His enthusiastic and knowledgeable discussion of Crazy Horse and the techniques used in mountain carving captured the audience's attention and provided a unique blend of technical insight and powerful storytelling. Jeff donated to the conference a hand-carved feather replica that was raffled off with the proceeds supporting Crazy Horse Memorial.



The conference welcomed Buck Hawkins, ISEE Executive Director. An ISEE Seismograph Operators Certificate Program, taught by Dr. Cathy Aimone-Martin and Doug Rudenko, P.G., was held in conjunction with the conference and well attended.



This conference is sponsored by Penn State's College of Earth and Mineral Sciences and the John and Willie Leone Family Department of Energy and Mineral Engineering, the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of ISEE, the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of ISEE, and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Continued on page 10



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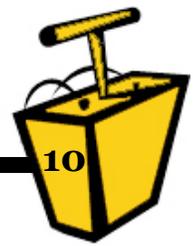
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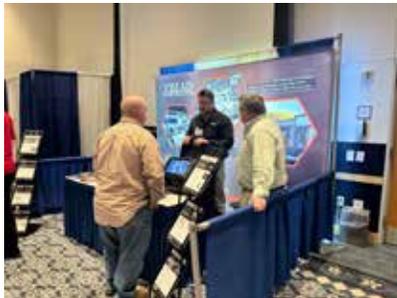
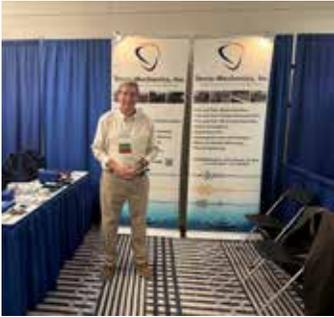
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PA Blasting Conference Continued



Continued on page 11

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PA Blasting Conference Continued

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- Jerry Brumbaugh, Wampum Hardware Company
- Christopher Catalano, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection – Explosives & Safety
- Aaron Christ, New Enterprise Stone & Lime
- Rachel Conaway, Penn State
- Mark DiFonzo, Quick Supply Co.
- John Farris, Penn State
- Dave Harrison, Terra-Mechanics
- Tom Hairhoger, Austin Powder Company
- Kristin Klemish, Vibra-Tech Engineers
- Daniel Ray Leach, Sales and Operations Consultant
- Shimin Liu, Penn State
- Dale Marker, Hanson Aggregates
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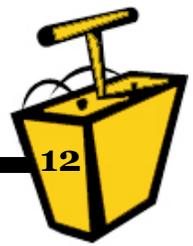
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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION Bureau of Mining Programs

EXPLOSIVES & SAFETY SECTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Training New Blasters

By Christopher D Catalano, Chief, Explosives and Safety Section, Department of Environmental Protection / Bureau of Mining Programs

Hiring and keeping good employees is not easy, and when it comes to hiring people with unique specializations and qualifications, like blasters, it can be especially challenging. I routinely hear blasting company operators lament that there are too few young people coming into the field, and as I attend conferences, it does seem to me that our collective hair grows greyer while the numbers of attendees remains relatively static. Many companies seek to build their ranks by hiring laborers and drivers, who become for them a pool of candidates who can eventually be trained as blasters. The benefit of doing this is the opportunity to instill a sense of company loyalty early and to training according to the methodologies and policies of that particular company. But with this method comes its own challenges. A training program can easily become an echo chamber of company culture, which, if the culture is less than reputable, can lead to blasters who further poor or unethical practices.

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Avery Martin
Sales Manager East USA Surface Drills

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avery.martin@sandvik.com

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Territory Manager - Southern US
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mhelfenstein@reichdrill.com
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New Blasters Continued

One requirement for becoming a blaster in Pennsylvania is obtaining at least one year of practical experience as a blaster learner, that is one year actively learning to become a blaster. As part of the application process for a Pennsylvania Blaster's License the applicant describes their experience. The application is to be accompanied by a statement from someone attesting to the applicants' experience. While this statement is a notarized statement made to officials, we have found that trust-but-verify is still a necessary position. For this reason, the Department is stressing the importance of having a written record of training activities that clearly demonstrates that the applicant has actually worked in the capacity of a blaster learner. Including this written record in a license application package will help ensure that the Department has no doubt as to the applicant's purported experience. While regulations do not specifically require a written record of training, it is incumbent upon us to somehow confirm with a reasonable degree of certainty that an applicant does in fact have the experience they claim to have. To avoid any doubt about whether a license applicant has the required experience it is far better to have a record of their training experience included in the application than to not. The Department will withhold issuing a license if it appears that a person does not have an appropriate amount of experience. A written record of experience as a blaster learner may be in the form of a record kept on a paper form, in a notebook, on blasting records, in a spreadsheet, or in a database.

But, what exactly does it mean to obtain a year of practical experience? Well, one thing it is not is simply being a bulk truck driver, magazine keeper, or laborer for one year. It does mean that the applicant has been actively learning to be blaster, designing blasts, loading holes, learning to make the decisions a blaster-in-charge has to make, creating complete and accurate blasting records, just to name a few of the key aspects. Driving a bulk truck and keeping magazine inventories straight is part of being a blaster, so we recognize that those activities contribute to the one year of experience, but they cannot be the majority of the experience.

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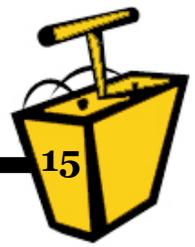
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New Blasters Continued

The Department defines one year of experience as both of the following:

- Being employed by a blasting company or serving as an apprentice to a licensed blaster for at least 365 days (12 months) in the capacity of a blaster learner, during which the applicant was consistently engaged in blaster training and the peripheral activities associated with blasting. This experience does not necessarily have to take place in Pennsylvania or be under the direction of a Pennsylvania licensed blaster. Prior experience with explosives in law enforcement, the military, or as a Limited Licensee can account for a portion of the training time, but not all of it (generally 3 months' worth).
- Having a verifiable (preferably written) record of at least 121 days of hands-on practical experience as a blaster preparing, designing, laying out, loading, and making decisions about the blasts.

As we move into 2026 and beyond I hope this sheds a little more light on what the Department will be looking for as we attempt to uphold our responsibility of ensuring that we are only licensing individuals who are well-trained, qualified persons.

Continued on page 16



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New Blasters Continued

Finally, for all of you who have the privilege of training up a new blaster, I want to encourage you not to take the responsibility lightly. Being a blaster is more than just knowing how to load a blast hole. It truly is an art that requires professionalism, a measure of both care and confidence, and the ability to see the bigger pictures of site design and the effects of blasting beyond the blast site. A blaster is both a complaint generator and a complaint mitigator whose demeanor can play a big role in how blasting is perceived by the general public. A blaster is the point man for regulators coming to the site, where again, demeanor matters. Finally, and I think perhaps most importantly, do not train new blasters to be you; inspire them in their own strengths and abilities to be the best blaster they can be.



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Apply Now for the 2026-2027 SEE Foundation Scholarships!

The Society of Explosives Engineers Education Foundation (SEE Foundation) is now accepting applications for its 2026-2027 scholarships, offering up to \$125,000 USD to students pursuing degrees related to the explosives industry.

These scholarships are available to students at all levels, undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate, who are studying in fields related to commercial explosives. Awards are based on academic achievements, professional goals, a personal challenges narrative, and financial need.

Application Deadline: May 8, 2026, 11:59 p.m. (US Eastern Time)

How to Apply: Submit completed applications to scholarship@isee.org

<https://isee.org/resources/students/scholarships>

An advertisement for Austin Powder Mining. The background shows a worker in blue jeans and brown boots standing in a quarry, with a yellow hose and red safety lines visible. A white ladder is leaning against the ground, with five white labels attached to it, each with a red arrow pointing to the left. The labels read: Safety, Equipment, Processes, Results, and Regulations. On the left side, the text 'DETAILS MATTER IN ALL WE DO.' is written in large, bold, white capital letters. At the bottom left, there is a red banner with the Austin Powder Mining logo and the text 'AUSTIN POWDER | MINING'. Below the banner, the text reads: 'The details are in our DNA. Learn more at austinpowder.com'. At the very bottom, the contact information is listed: '(814) 342-1681 • scott.kassab@austinpowder.com'.

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Executive Board Renewed

Several members of the Eastern PA Chapter board are up for renewal. Those members include:

Ron Eichler
John Benedict
Justin Smith
Doug Rudenko
Michael Hoover
Danny Ray Leach

During the February 17, 2026 Chapter Board of Directors meeting, a motion to renew all members was made and the Board voted in favor. Congratulations!



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It's Membership Renewal Time

June is the Chapters Membership Renewal period. Invoices will be emailed in May and the Chapter would appreciate everyone's prompt renewal.

Membership in the Eastern PA Chapter of the ISEE keeps you connected to news and events in the drilling, blasting and seismic fields. Members receive benefits such as quarterly newsletters, training opportunities, regulatory and safety updates as well as informational and social events. A yearly membership only costs \$35. And you can save with a Corporate Membership! A corporate membership includes up to 5 members and a free business card advertisement in the quarterly newsletter (\$60 value)- all for \$155. A deluxe corporate membership includes up to 10 members and a 1/2 page advertisement in the quarterly newsletter (\$180 value)- all for \$255.

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2. Complete the membership form on page 23
3. Check your email and pay your membership renewal invoice online



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