

# Occupational safety and health administration analysis



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OSHA or the U.

S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration is a federal government agency that is under the wings of the Department of Labor. It is entrusted with enforcing rules, or standards, aimed at preventing work-related sicknesses, injuries, and fatalities. Aside from enforcing workplace safety standards, OSHA also provides training programs, outreach activities, and educational seminars. The agency was created through the passing of the Occupational Safety and Health Act on December 29, 1970, during the administration of President Richard Nixon.

OSHA's current head is Edwin Foulke, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Labor. To properly carry out its functions, OSHA, in partnership with the different states, have more than 2000 inspectors, investigators for discrimination complaints, doctors, teachers, writers, technical staff, and support personnel distributed in about 200 offices nationwide. OSHA also conducts an ongoing public consultation in order to improve its services. The agency's representatives hold periodic meetings with employees and employers, focus groups, and plant workers to get feedback and input concerning work and safety-related topics.

AuthorityThe occupational safety agency has authority, as mandated by law, over federal government workers and most private employees. Mining and transportation workers, and the self-employed are not under OSHA's authority. State and local public workers are protected under the OSH Act of 1970. Under the OSH Act, states' safety and health 2 plans are permitted as

long as they give protection similar to what OSHA can provide to both public and private sector workers in the region.

If a state has its own workplace health and safety program that meets OSHA standards, the federal agency will shoulder some of the costs associated with the state's program. There are twenty states in the country that have their own programs to protect public and private industry employees. The states of Connecticut, the Virgin Islands, New York, and New Jersey, have programs applicable only to the public sector employees. In these states, OSHA has jurisdiction over employees hired by private companies.

The Postal Service agency is the only quasi-government body under the responsibility of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The transfer of authority was enforced in 2000 under the Postal Act.

Regulations Since its inception in 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has implemented a number of changes in workplace safety and health. Among these are:

- Imposing a maximum concentration limit on chemicals and dusts;
- The use of protective clothing and equipment when handling dangerous chemicals;
- Turning off electrical equipment when conducting maintenance or repair; and
- Imposing the provision of safeguards on excavations and trenches.

Website The agency's online site provides information that an organization or worker needs to know about the organization and its role in the work environment.

Safety and health guidelines are posted in its Web address for easy access and to serve as 3 reference. There are separate sections for Hispanic workers and employers, teen employees, and small business enterprises. A

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news section is also provided in the site where updates concerning the agency's activities and regulatory information are posted. Section II: News Articles OSHA provides news advisory on its Web site to apprise the public of new developments regarding safety and health issues.

Among the number of news items on its site are: • Pandemic Flu • Safety and Health Training Grants • Alliance News • Ergonomics for shipyards Pandemic Flu In a handbook entitled “ Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic,” OSHA provides guidelines for employers in accordance with their responsibility to ensure that employees work in safe and healthy environments. This manual does not impose new regulations on employers. Rather, it encourages employers to create a plan in case health disasters occur. In particular, this handbook focuses on pandemic influenza and avian influenza. There are thirteen relevant chapters in this manual, which define the two illnesses, how they spread, how they can be avoided, and how organizations can continue operations when there is pandemic influenza or avian flu. 4 This handbook is very helpful to organizations since details and explanations regarding these two viruses are provided here, as well as helpful suggestions concerning prevention and continuance of an organization's operations in case of pandemics.

According to the manual, a pandemic influenza occurs when a new flu virus is discovered causing widespread illness. Bird flu, on the other hand, generally infects birds. However, the highly pathogenic type of avian flu can infect humans fatally. OSHA says that industries need to plan for pandemic influenza and bird flu to minimize its adverse effect on business. The agency

points to power and telecommunication firms as examples of critical infrastructure providers, and as such, should plan accordingly.

The spread of avian influenza to humans is rare, but scientists want industries to be prepared since viruses have a way of evolving and becoming more deadly. This forward thinking is not only helpful to businesses but to the entire population. By doing preemptive actions, the disastrous effects of pandemics will be lessened. The handbook suggests including these items in a company's disaster plan:

- keep in touch with government agencies to be informed regarding their disaster plans;
- have an alternative working schedule in case the affected number of employees are high;
- enforce a sick leave policy that does not discourage people from availing of the leave when feeling symptoms of flu; and
- 5 • identify exposure risks and health hazard zones.

With the changing weather patterns, it is highly likely that a new influenza virus will affect the population.

By reading this handbook and following the suggestions provided by OSHA, workplace illnesses and disturbances will be minimized. Safety and Health Training Grants In a news release, OSHA announces the opening of its application period for \$6. 7-million in grants to be awarded to nonprofit organizations for their safety and health training programs. In particular, OSHA seeks candidates for the Susan Harwood Training Grants, whose deadline is on March 23, 2008. This article is good news for those not-for-profit groups, which seeks funding for training and educational endeavors related to safety and health. The topics that OSHA want studied include: health hazards in food processing; construction accidents; and combustible dusts.

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Those who are interested to apply for a grant can visit OSHA's Web site to find details of the funding. Alliance News In one of its news reports, OSHA discloses the signing of an alliance agreement with the kitchen cabinet-making industry. Employees and employers of this sector have agreed to cooperate with OSHA in order to prevent amputation hazards in the industry. Amputation is the major problem in this industry. Round table discussions, meetings and forums will be conducted to achieve the goal of reducing, if not eliminating, amputation accidents among kitchen cabinet makers.

This report will encourage other sectors, which do not have cooperation agreements with the occupation safety agency yet, to follow suit.

Ergonomics for Shipyards OSHA said in a news release that it has released its latest guidelines to prevent musculoskeletal problems in the shipyard industry. This new guidelines list practical ways to help employees and employers avoid or lessen the severity of the disorders in the workplace. Working in shipyard is a very hazardous occupation.

By completing this guidelines, OSHA has done its part in protecting the people of this industry. The agency will work with labor and trade unions in order to ensure compliance among companies.