



Editor's note—Cleaner Times has arranged with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for the agency to prepare short articles to help readers understand OSHA and its activities. This first article introduces the agency.

While many of you may have heard of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), how many of you know exactly what the organization does on a daily basis?

OSHA is part of the U.S. Department of Labor and was created as a result of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. The agency is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and has the mission of assuring the safety and health of America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards; providing training, outreach, and education; establishing partnerships; and encouraging continual improvement in workplace safety and health.

At OSHA's Directorate of Enforcement Programs (DEP), one of the agency's eight directorates, our job is to provide the OSHA family and the public with guidance on how to comply with the requirements of OSHA standards. We receive numerous phone calls, letters, and emails asking a variety of questions on specific enforcement activities and very specific enforcement and compliance questions. However, we also receive quite a number of questions on what OSHA is and what we do.

In this article, I will summarize some of the basic questions and answers about OSHA.

What does OSHA do?

There are three basic strategies OSHA uses to help employers and employees reduce injuries, illness, and deaths:

- Strong, fair, and effective enforcement
- Outreach, education, and compliance assistance

- Partnerships and other cooperative programs

Who is covered by OSHA?

Employers and employees in varied fields that include, but are not limited to, manufacturing, construction, longshoring, shipbuilding, ship breaking, ship repair, agriculture, law, medicine, charity and disaster relief, organized labor, private education and religious groups to the extent that they have employees for secular purposes.

Who is not covered?

- The self-employed
- Immediate members of farming families on farms that do not employ outside workers
- Employees whose working conditions are regulated by other federal agencies under other federal statutes. These include mine workers, certain truckers and transportation workers, and atomic energy workers
- Public employees in state and local governments; some states have their own occupational safety and health plans that cover these workers

What are State Plan states?

State Plan states are OSHA-approved job safety and health programs operated by individual states instead of federal OSHA. The OSH Act encourages states to develop and operate their own job safety and health plans and precludes state enforcement of OSHA standards unless the state has an approved plan.

What states have OSHA-approved State Plans?

Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Virginia, Washington, and

Wyoming. Please note that the Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Virgin Islands plans cover public sector (state and local government) employment only.

What are OSHA Standards?

OSHA issues standards for a wide variety of workplace hazards. Where there are no specific standards for a particular hazard, employers must comply with the OSH Act's General Duty Clause.

What is the General Duty Clause?

Section 5(a)(1) of the OSH Act requires employers to "furnish...a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees."

How does OSHA decide to develop a standard?

Under its own initiative, or in response to petitions from other parties, OSHA may start its standard development process.

What is the difference between a guideline and a standard?

A guideline is a voluntary tool to assist employers in recognizing and controlling hazards. It is not enforceable under the OSH Act.

What accidents must be reported to OSHA?

Within eight hours, employers upon learning about the death of any employee from a work-related incident and the in-patient hospitalization of three or more employees as a work-related incident must report it to OSHA. Further, employers must report all fatal heart attacks that occur at work.

OSHA has a publication available appropriately entitled *All About OSHA*. This publication answers several of the questions that are routinely received by OSHA.

Hopefully, this article clarified some questions about OSHA by summarizing some of the information found in the *All About OSHA* publication. If you need additional information, or to download a copy of the publication, visit OSHA's website at www.osha.gov. *cr*

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