

What You Need to Know About OSHA's New Enforcement Weighting System

OSHA recently announced that, beginning Oct. 1, 2015, the agency would be implementing a new system for planning and measuring its inspections, with more weight assigned to complex inspections that require more time and resources.

The new system will assign "Enforcement Units" to each inspection, with values ranging from "one" for simple inspections to "nine" for complex inspections. Given that more complex inspections require more resources, the numbers allow OSHA to quantify that difference. OSHA offered a few examples to help illustrate the kinds of numbers that the new Enforcement Weighting System would attach to certain inspections:

- **Seven Units:** Process safety management inspections
- **Three Units:** Workplace violence inspections
- **Three Units:** Inspections involving a chemical for which there is no permissible exposure limit

OSHA has run the weighted approach side by side with the agency's traditional counting system for the past two years. After this pilot period, OSHA determined that the weighted approach was more effective at achieving the agency's enforcement goals.

While OSHA emphasized that the agency has never operated according to a quota system, the new Enforcement Weighting System means that employers are likely to see an increase in the number of complex inspections—inspections that OSHA believes will be a more effective and impactful allocation of finite agency resources.

NEWS & NOTES

OSHA reports 10,000 fewer workplace violations in 2014

According to numbers released by OSHA, there were about 10,000 fewer safety violations last year—with a total of 67,941 in fiscal year (FY) 2014, down from 78,186 in FY 2013. The agency did point out that at least part of that decrease stemmed from the government shutdown that occurred Oct. 1-16, 2013. Without that shutdown, OSHA estimates that the number of total violations would have been approximately 71,000—still around 7,000 fewer than the year before.

Employer efforts to increase workplace safety appear to be paying off. The numbers show a general downward trend in violations across all categories. Since FY 2010, the number of total violations has fallen by almost a third, from 96,742 to 67,941, with nearly 86 percent of that decrease in violations coming from the "Serious" category.

New Standard on Confined Spaces in Construction

On Oct. 2, OSHA began to enforce a new standard on confined spaces in the construction industry. However, OSHA has delayed enforcement for employers engaged in residential construction until Jan. 8, 2016. The new standard is similar to the general industry confined spaces standard, but provides some additional procedures specific to the construction industry.

OSHA defines two types of confined spaces: a "regular" confined space that has limited means of entry and exit, and a "permit-required" confined space, which may also contain atmospheric, engulfment or other serious hazards.

Under the new standard, construction employers must develop a permit-required confined spaces program before workers can enter a permit-required confined space. The program must follow specific procedures contained in the new OSHA standard and should help employers to identify hazardous spaces and train employees to work safely in them.

Talk to Winton-Ireland, Strom & Green Insurance Agency today. We can provide you with our resources on permit-required confined spaces in construction so that you remain in compliance.

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