

1 Introduction to OSHA

The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) of 1970 created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to help employers and employees reduce injuries, illnesses, and deaths on the job in America. Since then, workplace fatalities have been cut by more than 60 percent, and occupational injury and illness rates have declined 40 percent. At the same time, U.S. employment has more than doubled and now includes over 115 million workers at 7.2 million worksites. OSHA provides national leadership in occupational safety and health. The agency seeks to find and share the most effective ways to help prevent worker fatalities and prevent workplace injuries and illnesses.

When employees stay whole and healthy, businesses also benefit. They experience lower workers' compensation insurance costs, reduced medical expenditures, decreased payout for return-to work programs, fewer faulty products, and lower costs for job accommodations for injured workers. There are also indirect benefits, such as increased productivity, lower costs for training replacement workers, and decreased costs for overtime.

Many employers have embraced OSHA regulations and reaped tremendous rewards. OSHA compliance should not be seen as a detriment to business; instead, it's a set of rules enacted by the agency to make safety of employees and improving their productivity top priorities. The American Dental Association (ADA) periodically renews its alliance with OSHA to encourage safe working conditions and share technical knowledge in several areas that affect employees in the dental industry (see **1.11.1 Agreement renewing an alliance between OSHA and ADA**)

Here is what others in the general industry say about OSHA programs at their workplace:

“It makes sense to run an effective safety and health program because your people deserve it, your customers demand it, and your business practices and future will not be there without it.” — **Dan Fergus, Genesee Stampings**

“Safety is a pass/fail item, in that if you fail at safety, the other stuff doesn’t matter.” — **Mac Armstrong, Air Transport Association**

“I want to see and hear my grandchildren, and because of the safety program at Curtis Lumber, I’m going to be able to.” — **John Meier, Curtis Lumber**

“We feel that it is our duty to have every employee return home to his or her family sound and healthy every day.” — **John Obel, NexTech**

1.1 What OSHA Does

OSHA uses three basic strategies authorized by the Occupational Safety and Health Act to help employers and employees reduce injuries, illnesses, and deaths on the job.

- Strong, fair, and effective enforcement.
- Outreach, education, and compliance assistance.
- Partnerships, alliances, and other cooperative and voluntary programs.

Based on these strategies, OSHA conducts a wide range of programs and activities to promote workplace safety and health. The agency:

- encourages employers and employees to reduce workplace hazards and to implement new safety and health management systems or improve existing programs;
- develops mandatory job safety and health standards and enforces them through worksite inspections, and, sometimes, by imposing citations, penalties, or both;
- promotes safe and healthful work environments through cooperative programs, including the Voluntary Protection Programs, OSHA Strategic Partnerships, and alliances;
- establishes responsibilities and rights for employers and employees to achieve better safety and health conditions;

- supports the development of innovative ways of dealing with workplace hazards;
- establishes requirements for injury and illness recordkeeping by employers, and for employer monitoring of certain occupational illnesses;
- establishes training programs to increase the competence of occupational safety and health personnel;
- provides technical and compliance assistance, as well as training and education, to help employers reduce worker accidents and injuries;
- works in partnership with states that operate their own occupational safety and health programs; and
- supports the consultation programs offered by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

1.2 OSHA's Impact

Since OSHA's creation in 1970, the nation has made substantial progress in occupational safety and health. OSHA and its many partners in the public and private sectors have, for example:

- cut the work-related fatality rate to historic lows for 2002 to 2004;
- from 2003 to 2004, reduced the number of workplace injuries and illnesses by 4 percent and lost workday case rates dropped by 5.8 percent in that same period;
- virtually eliminated brown lung disease in the textile industry;
- in 2005, OSHA conducted close to 39,000 inspections and issued just over 85,000 citations for violations; and
- in 2004, the consultation program made over 31,000 visits to employers.

1.3 OSHA's Continuing Role

Significant hazards and unsafe conditions still exist in U.S. workplaces. Each year:

- almost 5,200 Americans die from workplace injuries in the private sector;
- as many as 50,000 employees die from illnesses in which workplace exposures were a contributing factor;
- nearly 4.3 million people suffer non-fatal workplace injuries and illnesses; and
- the cost of occupational injuries and illnesses totals more than \$156 billion.