

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 was designed "to assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the Nation safe and healthful working conditions and to preserve our human resources."

There are more than 3.1 million federal civilian employees in more than 100 departments and agencies across the country. Each year thousands of these employees are injured, made ill, or die in work-related incidents.

For example, in fiscal 1988, more than 165,000 occupational injuries and illnesses occurred, involving civilian federal employees. Beyond the human implications of these statistics, this takes its toll on the American taxpayer. Chargeback billings of federal agencies arising from the injuries and illnesses suffered by federal employees totalled more than \$1.1 billion in 1988.

To focus on this problem, Section 19 of the Act specifically charges the head of each federal agency with the responsibility to "establish and maintain an effective and comprehensive occupational safety and health program which is consistent with the standards" set by OSHA for private sector employees.

That broad mandate is further defined by Presidential Executive Order 12196 which identifies the responsibilities of the agencies and the role of the Secretary of Labor in developing, implementing and evaluating such programs.

The Secretary of Labor also has been assigned broad responsibilities under Section 19 of the Act. Department of Labor regulations (Title 29 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1960) spell out in detail the responsibilities of the Secretary of Labor and of the heads of other federal agencies under the Act and the Executive Order.

This fact sheet summarizes provisions of Section 19 of the Act, Executive Order 12196, and Part 1960 of Title 29 so that federal employees and managers may be informed of their rights and responsibilities under the Act.

Agency Responsibilities:

- To furnish to employees places and conditions of employment that are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm.
- To set up procedures for responding to employee reports of unsafe and unhealthful working conditions.
- To acquire, maintain, and require the use of approved personal protective equipment and safety equipment.
- To inspect all workplaces at least annually with participation by representatives of employees.
- To establish procedures to assure that no employee is subject to restraint, interference, coercion, discrimination, or reprisal for exercising his/her rights under the agency's safety and health program.
- To post notices of unsafe or unhealthful working conditions found during inspections.

- To assure prompt abatement of hazardous conditions. Employees exposed to the conditions shall be informed of the abatement plan. Imminent danger corrections must be made immediately.
- To set up a management information system to keep records of occupational accidents, injuries, illnesses, and their causes; and to post annual summaries of injuries and illnesses for a minimum of 30 days at each establishment.
- To conduct occupational safety and health training programs for top management, supervisors, safety and health personnel, employees and employee representatives.

Employee Responsibilities:

- To comply with all OSHA and approved agency occupational safety and health standards.
- To comply with agency policies and directives relative to the safety and health program.
- To use personal protective equipment and safety equipment provided by the agency.

Rights of Employees and their Representatives:

- To participate in their agency's safety and health program. Employees shall be authorized official time to participate in the activities provided by Executive Order 12196, 29 CFR Part 1960 and the agency's safety and health program.
- To have access to agency safety and health information including data on hazardous substances in agency workplaces.
- To comment on standards their agency proposes that differ from OSHA standards.
- To report and request inspections of unsafe or unhealthful working conditions to the appropriate officials, including the Secretary of Labor. However, the Secretary of Labor encourages employees to use agency procedures for reporting hazardous conditions as the most expeditious means to achieve abatement.

For more information, call OSHA's Office of Federal Agency Programs at (202)523-8081.

This is one of a series of fact sheets highlighting U.S. Department of Labor programs. It is intended as a general description only and does not carry the force of legal opinion.