

The Department of Labor Has Announced a New National Emphasis Program to Prevent Hazards in High-Risk Workplaces

Labor & Employment Law Update

By Matthew Horn on July 13, 2023

A link to the full text of the program can be found on the OSHA website.

SUMMARY:

OSHA is launching a new three-year initiative it claims is intended to prevent workplace hazards in warehouses, processing facilities, distribution centers, and high-risk retail establishments. High-risk retail establishments covered by the program include:

- Home centers
- Hardware stores
- Other building material dealers
- Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores
- Warehouse clubs and supercenters

The program will focus on hazards related to:

- Powered industrial vehicle operations
- Material handling and storage
- Walking and working surfaces
- Means of egress and fire protection
- Heat
- Ergonomics

OSHA will conduct comprehensive safety inspections of establishments in these industries. The scope of an inspection may be expanded if evidence shows that violations exist in other areas of the establishment. Inspected establishments will be chosen from two lists:

1. Establishments with industry codes covered under this emphasis program.
2. A limited number of retail establishments with the highest rates of injuries and illnesses resulting in:
 - Days away
 - Restricted duty
 - Job transfer

State plans will be required to adopt this initiative or establish a different program at least as stringent as the federal model.

2 STEPS IMPLICATED BUSINESSES CAN TAKE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES GOING FORWARD:

1. **Proactively identify and address workplace hazards at your workplace:** Employers should proactively conduct regular safety inspections to identify potential hazards in their workplaces—especially those subject to expansive comprehensive inspections under this new national emphasis program. If any hazardous conditions are identified, employers should take the necessary steps to correct them.
2. **Prepared for the inevitable comprehensive inspection:** Prepare, implement, and train employees on the policies and procedures that should be employed if and when an OSHA inspector arrives onsite. Having a clearly defined and implemented inspection management procedure in place before OSHA comes knocking is the best way to reduce potential exposure to OSHA citations.

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