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**Occupational
Safety and Health
Administration**

Workers' Rights

U.S. Department of Labor

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

OSHA 3021-02R 2023



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Who Does OSHA Cover

The OSH Act provides workplace safety and health protection to most private sector employers and their workers, and federally covered public sector employers and workers in the 50 states and certain territories and jurisdictions. Those jurisdictions include the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Wake Island, Johnston Island, and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands as defined in the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.

Private Sector Workers

Federal OSHA covers most private sector employers and workers in 29 states, the District of Columbia, Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Wake Island, Johnston Island, and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands. Private sector workers in the remaining 21 states and Puerto Rico are covered by OSHA-approved State Plans.

State plans are OSHA-approved workplace safety and health programs operated by individual states instead of Federal OSHA. The OSH Act encourages states to develop and operate their own workplace safety and health programs and precludes state enforcement of OSHA standards unless the state has an approved State Plan. OSHA approves and monitors all State Plans and provides up to fifty percent of the funding for each program. State Plans must be at least as effective as the Federal OSHA program. To find the

Exceptions to State Plan private sector coverage are listed on each State Plan's webpage at www.osha.gov/stateplans.

Complaints About State Program Administration

States that assume responsibility for their own occupational safety and health programs must have provisions at least as effective as Federal OSHA's, including the protection of worker rights.

Any interested person or group, including individual workers, with a complaint concerning the operation or administration of a State Plan may submit a complaint to the appropriate Federal OSHA Region (regional offices are listed at the end of this guide). This is called a Complaint About State Program Administration (CASPA). The complainant's name will be kept confidential. OSHA will determine whether an investigation is warranted, and will investigate all such complaints. Where investigated complaints are found to have merit, OSHA may require appropriate corrective action on the part of the state.

OSHA regulations allow states and territories to develop State Plans that cover only state and local government workers. In states with state and local government only State Plans, private sector workers and employers remain under Federal OSHA jurisdiction. Six additional states and one U.S. territory have OSHA-approved State Plans that cover state and local government workers only:

- Connecticut
- Illinois
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- New Jersey
- New York
- Virgin Islands

Federal Government Workers

OSHA's protection applies to all federal agencies. Although OSHA does not fine federal agencies, it does monitor these agencies and conducts federal workplace inspections in response to workers' reports of hazards.

Maritime, and Agriculture. (General Industry is the set that applies to the largest number of workers and worksites). These standards are designed to protect workers from a wide range of hazards.

These standards also limit the amount of hazardous chemicals, substances, or noise that workers can be exposed to; require the use of certain safe work practices and equipment; and require employers

hazard control measures. Employers must provide most protective equipment free of charge. Employers are responsible for knowing when protective equipment is needed.

Right to Information

OSHA gives workers and their representatives the right to see information that employers collect on hazards in the workplace. Workers have the right to know what hazards are present in the workplace and how to protect themselves. Many OSHA standards require various methods that employers must use to inform their employees, such as warning signs, color-coding, signals, and training. Workers must receive their normal rate of pay to attend training that is required by OSHA standards and rules. The training must be in a language and vocabulary that workers can understand.

Right to Know about Chemical Hazards

The Hazard Communication standard, known as the “right-to-know” standard, requires employers to inform and train workers about hazardous chemicals and substances in the workplace. Employers must:

- Provide workers with effective information and training on hazardous chemicals in their work area. This training must be in a language and vocabulary that workers can understand;
- Keep a current list of hazardous chemicals that are in the workplace;
- Make sure that hazardous chemical containers are properly labeled with the identity of the hazardous chemical and appropriate hazard warnings; and
- Have and make available to workers and their representatives Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) (formerly known as Material Safety Data Sheets or MSDSs) for each substance that provide detailed information about chemical hazards, their effects, how to prevent exposure, and emergency treatment if an exposure occurs.

Right to Know about Laws and Your Rights

Employers must display the official OSHA Poster, *Job Safety and Health: It's the Law*, in a place where workers will see it. It can be downloaded from the OSHA website, www.osha.gov/publications/poster. Pre-printed copies can also be obtained from OSHA.

Right to Get Copies of Workplace Injury and Illness Records

OSHA's Recordkeeping Rule requires employers in higher-hazard industries with more than ten employees to keep accurate and complete records of work-related injuries and illnesses. (Certain low-hazard workplaces such as offices are not required to keep such records). Employers must record any serious work-related injury or illness on the OSHA Form 300. A serious injury or illness is one that required medical treatment other than first aid, restricted work or days away from work. (Details of each incident are entered on a separate form, the OSHA Form 301). This OSHA Form 300 becomes an ongoing log of all recordable incidents. Each year from February 1 through April 30, employers must post a summary of the injury and illness log from the previous year (OSHA Form 300A) in a place where workers can see it. Workers and their representatives have the right to receive copies of the full OSHA Form 300 log. Following a request, employers must make copies available at the end of the next business day.

These injury and illness logs are important because they provide a comprehensive guide to possible hazards in the workplace that may need correcting. The logs should be used to focus on areas with high injury and illness rates, and to find and fix hazards in order to prevent future occurrences.

Right to Exposure Data

Many OSHA standards require employers to run tests of the workplace environment to find out if their workers are being exposed to harmful levels of hazardous substances such as lead or asbestos, or high levels of noise or radiation. These types of tests are called exposure monitoring. OSHA gives workers the right to get the results of these tests.

Right to Your Medical Records

Some OSHA standards require medical tests to find out if a worker's health has been affected because of exposures at work. For example, employers must test for hearing loss in workers exposed to excessive noise or for decreased lung function in workers exposed to asbestos. Workers have a right to their medical records. Workers' representatives also have a right to review these records but they must first get written permission from the worker to gain access to their medical information.

OSHA Worksite Investigations

OSHA conducts on-site inspections of worksites to enforce the OSHA law that protects workers and their rights. Inspections are initiated without advance notice, conducted using on-site or telephone and facsimile investigations, and performed by highly trained compliance officers. Worksite inspections are conducted based on the following priorities:

- Imminent danger;
- A fatality or hospitalizations;
- Worker complaints and referrals;
- Targeted inspections – particular hazards, high injury rates; and
- Follow-up inspections.

Inspections are conducted without employers knowing when or where they will occur. The employer is not informed in advance that there will be an inspection, regardless of whether it is in response to a complaint or is a programmed inspection.

hazard. **A written complaint that reports a serious hazard and is signed by a current worker(s) or their representative and mailed or otherwise submitted to an OSHA area or regional office is more likely to result in an on-site OSHA inspection.** Complaints received online from workers in OSHA-approved State Plans will be forwarded to the appropriate state plan for response. For more information, visit www.osha.gov/workers/file-complaint.

2. Fax/Mail/Email the OSHA Complaint Form or Send a Letter Describing Your Complaint

– Download the OSHA complaint form from our website (or request a copy from your local OSHA regional or area office), complete it and then fax, mail, or email it back to your nearest OSHA regional or area office. Written complaints that report a serious hazard and are signed by a current worker or representative and submitted to the closest OSHA area office are given priority and are more likely to result in on-site OSHA inspections. A worker or their representative can request (on the form) that OSHA not let their employer know who filed the complaint. Please include your name, address and telephone number so we can contact you to follow up. This information is confidential.

3. Telephone

– Call your local OSHA regional or area office at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). OSHA staff can discuss your complaint and respond to any questions you have. **If there is an emergency or the hazard is immediately life-threatening, call your local OSHA regional or area office.**

Who else can file a complaint?

Employee representatives, for the purposes of filing a complaint, are defined as any of the following:

- An authorized representative of the employee bargaining unit, such as a certified or recognized labor organization.
- An attorney acting for an employee.
- Any other person acting in a bona fide representative capacity, including, but not limited to, members of the clergy, social workers, spouses and other family members, health care providers and government officials or nonprofit groups and organizations acting upon specific complaints or injuries from individuals who are employees. In general, the affected employee should have requested, or at least approved, the filing of the complaint on his or her behalf.

In addition, anyone who knows about a workplace safety or health hazard may report unsafe conditions to OSHA, and OSHA will investigate the concerns reported.

Rights of Workers during an Inspection

During an inspection, workers or their representatives have the following rights:

- Have a representative of employees, such as the safety steward of a labor organization, go along on the inspection;
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Right to Use Your Rights:
Protection against Retaliation
Whistleblower Protection

The OSH Act prohibits employers from retaliating against their employees for using their rights under the OSH Act. These rights include raising safety and health concerns with an employer, reporting a work-related injury or illness, filing a complaint with OSHA, seeking an OSHA inspection, participating in an OSHA inspection and participating or testifying in any proceeding related to an OSHA inspection.

Protection from retaliation means that an employer cannot retaliate by taking “adverse action” against workers, such as:

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1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or send a letter to your closest regional or area office. No form is required. In states with approved state plans, employees may file a complaint with both the State and Federal OSHA.

Following a complaint, OSHA will contact the complainant and conduct an interview to determine whether an investigation is necessary.

If the evidence shows that the employee has been retaliated against for exercising safety and health rights, OSHA will ask the employer to restore that worker's job, earnings, and benefits. If the employer refuses, OSHA may take the employer to court. In such cases, a Department of Labor attorney will represent the employee to obtain this relief.

If There is a Dangerous Situation at Work

If you believe working conditions are unsafe or unhealthful, we recommend that you bring the conditions to your employer's attention, if possible.

You may file a complaint with OSHA concerning a hazardous working condition at any time. However, you should not leave the worksite merely because you have filed a complaint. If the condition clearly presents a risk of death or serious physical harm, there is not sufficient time for OSHA to inspect, and, where possible, you have brought the condition to the attention of your employer, you may have a legal right to refuse to work in a situation in which you would be exposed to the hazard.

If a worker, with no reasonable alternative, refuses in good faith to expose himself or herself to a dangerous condition, he or she would be protected from subsequent retaliation. The condition must be of such a nature that a reasonable person would conclude that there is a real danger of death or serious harm and that there is not enough time to contact OSHA and for OSHA to inspect. Where

Additional Whistleblower Protections

Since passage of the OSH Act in 1970, Congress has expanded OSHA's whistleblower protection authority to protect workers from retaliation under more than 20 federal laws. These laws protect workers who report violations of various workplace safety, airline, antitrust, anti-money laundering, commercial motor carrier, consumer product, environmental, financial reform, healthcare reform, nuclear, pipeline, public transportation agency, railroad, maritime, securities, and tax laws. Complaints must be reported to OSHA within set timeframes following the retaliatory action, as prescribed by each law. These laws, and the number of days workers have to file a complaint, are:

Employee Safety and Environmental Protection Laws

- ***Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA)*** (90 days). Provides retaliation protection for individuals who report violations of environmental laws relating to asbestos in public or private nonprofit elementary and secondary school systems.
- ***Clean Air Act (CAA)*** (30 days). Provides retaliation protection for employees who, among other things, report violations of this law, which provides for the development and enforcement of standards regarding air quality and air pollution.
- ***Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)*** (30 days). Protects employees who report regulatory violations involving accidents, spills, and other emergency releases of pollutants into the environment. The law also protects employees who report violations related to the cleanup of uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites.
- ***Energy Reorganization Act (ERA)*** (180 days). Protects certain employees in the nuclear industry who report violations of the Atomic Energy Act (AEA). Protected employees include employees of operators, contractors and subcontractors of nuclear power plants licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and employees of contractors working with the Department of Energy under a contract pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act.
- ***Federal Water Pollution Control Act (FWPCA) (also known as the Clean Water Act)*** (30 days). Provides retaliation protection for employees who, among other things, report violations of the law controlling water pollution.

- ***National Transit Systems Security Act (NTSSA)*** (180 days). Provides protection to public transit employees who, among other things, report an alleged violation of any federal law, rule, or regulation relating to public transportation agency safety or security, or fraud, waste, or abuse of federal grants or other public funds intended to be used for public transportation safety or security; refuse to violate or assist in the violation of any federal law, rule, or regulation relating to public transportation safety or security; report a hazardous safety or security condition; refuse to work when confronted by a hazardous safety or security condition related to the performance of the employee's duties (under imminent danger circumstances).
- ***Pipeline Safety Improvement Act (PSIA)*** (180 days). Provides retaliation protection for employees who report violations of the federal laws regarding pipeline safety and security or who refuse to violate such provisions.
- ***Seaman's Protection Act (SPA)*** (180 days). Seamen are protected, among other things, for reporting to the Coast Guard or other federal agency a reasonably believed violation of a maritime safety law or regulation prescribed under that law or regulation. The law also protects work refusals where the employee reasonably believes an assigned task would result in serious injury or impairment of health to the seaman, other seamen, or the public and when the seaman sought, and was unable to obtain correction of the unsafe conditions.
- ***Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA)*** (180 days). Provides retaliation protection for truck drivers and other employees relating to the safety of commercial motor vehicles. Coverage includes all buses for hire and freight trucks with a gross vehicle weight greater than 10,001 pounds.
- ***Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (AIR21)*** (90 days). Provides retaliation protection for employees of air carriers, contractors, or subcontractors of air carriers who, among other things, raise safety concerns.

Health Insurance and Fraud Prevention Laws

- ***Affordable Care Act (ACA)*** (180 days). Protects employees who report violations of any provision of Title I of the ACA, including but not limited to retaliation based on an individual's receipt of health

insurance subsidies, the denial of coverage based on a preexisting condition, or an insurer's failure to rebate a portion of an excess premium.

- ***Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA)*** (90 days). Protects employees who report potential money laundering violations to their employers or to the federal government.
- ***Consumer Financial Protection Act (CFPA), Section 1057 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act*** (180 days). Protects employees who report perceived violations of any provision of the *Dodd-Frank Act*, which encompasses nearly every aspect of the financial services industry. The law also protects employees who report violations of any rule, order, standard or prohibition prescribed by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection.
- ***Criminal Antitrust Anti-Retaliation Act (CAARA)*** (180 days). Protects employees who report criminal antitrust violations to their employers or the federal government, or engage in related protected activities.
- ***Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX)*** (180 days). Protects employees of certain companies who report alleged mail, wire, bank or securities fraud; violations of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rules and regulations; or violations of federal laws related to fraud against shareholders. The law covers employees of publicly traded companies and companies required to file certain reports with the SEC.
- ***Taxpayer First Act (TFA)*** (180 days). Provides retaliation protection for employees who report underpayment of tax, violations of internal revenue laws, or violations of federal law relating to tax fraud; or engage in other related protected activities.

Consumer Safety Laws

- ***Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA)*** (180 days). Protects employees who report to their employer, the federal government, or a state attorney general reasonably perceived violations of any statute or regulation within the jurisdiction of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). CPSIA covers employees of consumer product manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers, and private labelers.
- ***FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)*** (180 days). Protects employees of food manufacturers, distributors, packers, and

Visit www.osha.gov/complianceassistance/cas or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) to contact your local OSHA office.

No-Cost On-Site Safety and Health Consultation Services for Small Business
OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program offers no-cost and confidential advice to small and medium-sized businesses in all states, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. On-Site consultation services are separate from enforcement and do not result in penalties or citations.

For more information or to find the local On-Site Consultation office in your state, visit www.osha.gov/consultation, or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742).

Under the consultation program, certain exemplary employers may request participation in OSHA's **Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP)**. Worksites that receive SHARP recognition are exempt from programmed inspections during the period that the SHARP certification is valid.

Cooperative Programs

OSHA offers cooperative programs under which businesses, labor groups and other organizations can work cooperatively with OSHA. To find out more about any of the following programs, visit www.osha.gov/cooperativeprograms.

Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

The OSHA Strategic Partnerships (OSP) provide the opportunity for OSHA to partner with employers, workers, professional or trade associations, labor organizations, and/or other interested stakeholders. Through the Alliance Program, OSHA works with groups to develop compliance assistance tools and resources to share with workers and employers, and educate workers and employers about their rights and responsibilities.

Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP)

The VPP recognize employers and workers in the private sector and federal agencies who have implemented effective safety and health programs and maintain injury and illness rates below the national average for their respective industries.

Occupational Safety and Health Training
OSHA partners with more than 25 OSHA Training Institute Education Centers at multiple locations throughout the United States to deliver courses on OSHA standards and occupational safety and health topics to thousands of students a year. For more information on training courses, visit www.osha.gov/otiec.

OSHA Educational Materials

OSHA has many types of educational materials to assist employers and workers in finding and preventing workplace hazards.

All OSHA publications are free at www.osha.gov/publications and www.osha.gov/ebooks. You can also call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) to order publications.

Employers and safety and health professionals can sign-up for *QuickTakes*, OSHA's free, twice-monthly online newsletter with the latest news about OSHA initiatives and products to assist in finding and preventing workplace hazards. To sign up, visit www.osha.gov/quicktakes.

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to help ensure these conditions for America's workers by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.

**For assistance, contact us.
We are OSHA. We can help.**



OSHA Regional Offices

Region 1

Boston Regional Office
(CT*, ME*, MA*, NH, RI, VT*)
JFK Federal Building
25 New Sudbury Street, Room E340
Boston, MA 02203
(617) 565-9860 (617) 565-9827 Fax

Region 2

New York Regional Office
(NJ*, NY*, PR*, VI*)
Federal Building
201 Varick Street, Room 670
New York, NY 10014
(212) 337-2378 (212) 337-2371 Fax

Region 3

Philadelphia Regional Office
(DE, DC, MD*, PA, VA*, WV)
The Curtis Center
170 S. Independence Mall West, Suite 740 West
Philadelphia, PA 19106-3309
(215) 861-4900 (215) 861-4904 Fax

Region 4

Atlanta Regional Office
(AL, FL, GA, KY*, MS, NC*, SC*, TN*)
Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street, SW, Room 6T50
Atlanta, GA 30303
(678) 237-0400 (678) 237-0447 Fax

Region 5

Chicago Regional Office
(IL*, IN*, MI*, MN*, OH, WI)
John C. Kluczynski Federal Building
230 South Dearborn Street, Room 3244
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 353-2220 (312) 353-7774 Fax

Region 6

Dallas Regional Office
(AR, LA, NM*, OK, TX)
A. Maceo Smith Federal Building
525 Griffin Street, Room 602
Dallas, TX 75202
(972) 850-4145 (972) 850-4149 Fax

Region 7

Kansas City Regional Office
(IA*, KS, MO, NE)
Two Pershing Square Building
2300 Main Street, Suite 1010
Kansas City, MO 64108-2416
(816) 283-8745 (816) 283-0547 Fax

Region 8

Denver Regional Office
(CO, MT, ND, SD, UT*, WY*)
Cesar Chavez Memorial Building
1244 Speer Boulevard, Suite 551
Denver, CO 80204
(720) 264-6550 (720) 264-6585 Fax

Region 9

San Francisco Regional Office
(AZ*, CA*, HI*, NV*, and American Samoa,
Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands)
San Francisco Federal Building
90 7th Street, Suite 2650
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 625-2547 (415) 625-2534 Fax

Region 10

Seattle Regional Office
(AK*, ID, OR*, WA*)
Fifth & Yesler Tower
300 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1280
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 757-6700 (206) 757-6705 Fax

* These states and territories operate their own OSHA-approved job safety and health plans and cover state and local government employees as well as private sector employees. The Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Virgin Islands programs cover public employees only. (Private sector workers in these states are covered by Federal OSHA). States with approved programs must have standards that are identical to, or at least as effective as, the Federal OSHA standards.

Note: To get contact information for OSHA area offices, OSHA-approved State Plans and OSHA consultation projects, please visit us online at www.osha.gov or call us at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742).

**If you think your job
is unsafe and you have
questions, call OSHA.
We can help.**

For more information:

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