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OSHA Safety Cornerstones Newsletter

A newsletter of practical compliance and safety tips provided by HFG Benefits & Risk Management

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OSHA renews Alliance with Laser Institute of America to protect workers from laser hazards

Laser beam and non-beam hazards can expose workers to eye and skin damage, and those who work in industrial, research and medical workplaces have the highest risk of harmful exposure to lasers. To reduce preventable laser injuries, OSHA has renewed a two-year Alliance with the Laser Institute of America (LIA) to provide education and to share critical information with those who work with lasers.

Laser Hazards

Lasers produce intense, highly directional beams of light. Laser-induced tissue damage happens when the tissue proteins are denatured due to the temperature rise following absorption of laser energy.

Laser/Electrosurgery Plume

Every year, 500,000 workers, especially in the health care industry, are exposed to laser or electrosurgical smoke. The smoke plumes have traces of toxic gases, including carbon monoxide, which can produce respiratory irritation and has the potential for generating infectious viral fragments.

Radiation

Excessive exposure to non-ionizing radiation from lasers can cause tissue damage. Radiation sources are found in many different occupational settings and can affect the health of workers if not properly controlled.

OSHA's stance on lasers

"Worker exposure to laser beams can result in eye and skin damage, and in more serious cases, blindness and skin cancer," said Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health David Michaels. "This renewed Alliance will help broaden outreach efforts to workers and employers and share critical education and information to reduce preventable injuries."

More about OSHA's Alliance program

For more information on how OSHA works with groups to protect workers safety and health, please visit: www.osha.gov/dcsp/alliances/whatis.html.



OSHA announces intent to establish Whistleblower Protection Advisory Committee

In May, OSHA announced its intent to create a Whistleblower Protection Advisory Committee. The committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how OSHA administers whistleblower protections.

OSHA wants to strengthen protections for those workers who expose issues such as adulterated foods, air and water pollution, workplace safety hazards and securities and financial fraud, as bringing these issues to the attention of their employer and the government protects the health, safety and well-being of all Americans. However, some workers are afraid to speak out in fear of retaliation from their employers.

Employers are prohibited from retaliating against—or taking adverse actions such as firing, disciplining, denying benefits and demoting—employees who raise concerns about employer violations of various laws.

The committee will advise OSHA on the development and implementation of improved customer service models, enhancements in the investigative and enforcement process, training and regulations for OSHA investigations.

For more information, visit: www.whistleblowers.gov.



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OSHA kicks off summer campaign to prevent heat-related illnesses

Since 2003, more than 30 workers annually have died from heat stroke, a form of hyperthermia in which the body's temperature is elevated dramatically. OSHA has kicked off a national outreach initiative to educate employers and the workers about the hazards of working outdoors in hot weather. Heat rash and heat cramps can quickly lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke if simple prevention steps are not followed.

"For outdoor workers, 'water, rest and shade' are three words that can make a difference between life and death," said Secretary of Labor, Hilda L. Solis. To kick off the summer campaign, OSHA has developed heat illness educational materials in English and Spanish, as well as a curriculum to be used in workplace training. For more information, visit: www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html.

Bostik Inc. pays \$600K in fines after 2011 explosion

The U.S. Department of Labor has reached a settlement agreement with Bostik Inc., for citations issued after a March 2011 explosion. OSHA cited Bostik, a Middleton, Mass. adhesives manufacturer, with 50 alleged violations of workplace safety standards, including several serious deficiencies in the company's process safety management program. The explosion occurred in a process called direct solvation, during which a valve on the transfer line was inadvertently left open, resulting in the release of flammable acetone vapors. The vapors exploded and four workers were injured. In the settlement agreement, Bostik paid \$600,000 in fines; OSHA had originally proposed \$917,000.

Worker trapped in cotton bin; Ware Milling receives 30 violations

OSHA has cited Ware Milling Co. Inc., a Georgia-based feed supply company, for 30 safety and health violations when a worker became trapped after entering a cotton bin without proper equipment. The worker experienced leg numbness from a safety harness after hanging from a lanyard for an extended period of time before finally falling more than 10 feet onto the top of a cotton seed mill pile. Two of the violations were willful safety violations, including "failing to perform lockout/tagout procedures for the energy source of the screw auger when workers are inside the bins" and "failing to have a stationed observer who can provide emergency assistance." OSHA has proposed penalties of \$157,500.

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