

New OSHA Beryllium Standards

On Jan. 9, 2017, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a final rule to amend its beryllium standards for the construction, shipyard and general industries.

The final rule will reduce the eight-hour, permissible beryllium exposure limit from 2.0 micrograms per cubic meter to 0.2 micrograms per cubic meter. It also establishes a short-term exposure limit of 2.0 micrograms per cubic meter over a 15-minute sampling period.

The rule will require additional protections that include personal protective equipment, medical exams, medical surveillance and training.

The final rule becomes effective on March 10, 2017, though most provisions require compliance by March 12, 2018. Affected employers must provide newly required showers and changing rooms within two years after the effective date and implement new engineering controls within three years after the effective date.

OSHA estimates that the new rule will prevent 46 new cases of beryllium-related disease and save the lives of 94 workers annually.

Employers should become familiar with the new standards and evaluate their current workplace practices to ensure compliance with the final rule.

DOL Sues Contractor for Firing Safety Manager

According to a lawsuit filed on Dec. 28, 2016, a Tampa roofing contractor discriminated against its safety manager after he cooperated with an OSHA investigation. The Department of Labor (DOL) lawsuit was a result of an investigation by OSHA's Whistleblower Protection Program.

Under the program, employers are prohibited from retaliating against employees who raise protected concerns or provide protected information to the employer or government. The lawsuit seeks back wages, interest and injunctive relief as well as compensatory and punitive damages.

Construction Workers at Highest Risk for WMSDs

According to a recent Occupational and Environmental Medicine report, U.S. construction workers are at a higher risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) than all other industries combined. The back is the primary body part affected, with overexertion named as the major cause of WMSDs.

Employers should adopt ergonomic solutions at construction sites, such as training employees on safe lifting practices, in order to reduce the number of WMSDs and prevent lost wages.

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