

Navigating OSHA's Recent Updates: What Employers Need to Know

WRITTEN BY

Gregory S. Narsh | Moses M. Tincher

As businesses strive to maintain safe and compliant workplaces, staying informed about the latest updates from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is crucial. Recent changes, effective from 2024 through 2025, carry significant implications for employers across various industries. Below are key updates that employers should consider and their potential impact on business operations.

Introduction to OSHA

OSHA, a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Labor, is dedicated to ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for employees by setting and enforcing standards. Through inspections and investigations, OSHA ensures compliance with workplace safety regulations, addressing issues such as hazard prevention and safety training. Additionally, OSHA manages whistleblower cases, protecting employees who report violations or unsafe practices from retaliation. OSHA's mandate is to advocate for employee safety and rights, often viewing circumstances from the perspective of the workers to ensure their protection and well-being in the workplace.

Increased Penalties for Safety Violations

OSHA increases its maximum penalties for violations in mid-January each year. The increase is based on an inflation-based factor. [Effective January 15, 2025](#), OSHA increased its maximum penalties for serious and "other-than-serious" violations to a maximum penalty of \$16,550 per violation, while willful or repeated violations can result in fines up to \$165,514 per violation. OSHA's firmer stance on both the imposition of penalties and not backing away in penalty negotiations underscores the importance of compliance.

Revised Penalty Guidelines for Small Businesses

[Effective July 14, 2025](#), businesses with up to 25 employees can benefit from a 70% penalty reduction, previously reserved for those with 10 or fewer employees. Additionally, a new 15% reduction is available for employers that promptly address identified hazards, encouraging swift corrective actions. A 20% reduction is available to employers that either (1) have never been inspected by federal OSHA or a state plan, or (2) have been inspected within the past five years without receiving serious, willful, repeat, or failure-to-abate violations.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Construction

A new [rule](#), effective January 13, 2025, mandates that employers ensure PPE "fit[s] properly" for each

construction worker, regardless of their body size or type. Depending on circumstances, PPE in the construction industry may include hard hats, gloves, goggles, safety shoes, safety glasses, welding helmets, hearing protection devices, respirators, coveralls, vests, harnesses, and full body suits. This change aims to provide better protection by requiring correctly sized and adjusted gear, emphasizing the importance of personalized safety equipment. While specific to the construction industry, OSHA seeks to apply the “properly fit” standard across all industries. Notably, even when employees provide their own PPE, employers must check for proper fit under this new rule.

Proposed Heat Illness Prevention Standard

In August 2024, OSHA proposed a [rule](#) to address heat hazards in both indoor and outdoor work environments. If enacted, this rule could require employers to provide water, rest breaks, and shade in high-heat conditions, along with developing heat illness prevention plans. This proposal highlights OSHA’s commitment to safeguarding workers against heat-related illnesses and could result in additional whistleblower and safety violation claims concerning heat-related illness. Employers are encouraged to develop comprehensive heat illness prevention plans tailored to their specific work environments, which may include training programs to educate employees on recognizing symptoms of heat-related illnesses. Currently, individuals may participate in a notice-and-comment period until September 30, 2025.

Updated Inspection Programs

In May 2025, OSHA updated its Site-Specific Targeting (SST) [program](#), the primary planned inspection program for non-construction establishments with 20 or more employees. Under this program, OSHA focuses inspections on high-risk, non-construction workplaces using recent injury and illness data from 2021 to 2023. This targeted approach aims to identify establishments with the highest rates of workplace injuries.

OSHA has also increased efforts to support voluntary compliance through its On-Site Consultation Program. This free and confidential service helps small and medium-sized businesses identify and rectify workplace hazards, improve safety and health management systems, and comply with OSHA standards. Separate from OSHA’s enforcement activities, this program does not result in penalties or citations. Instead, it offers expert advice and assistance from state-run consultation agencies, focusing on preventing workplace injuries and illnesses. Employers can benefit from tailored recommendations and solutions to enhance their safety practices, fostering a safer work environment. Participation in the program can lead to recognition through OSHA’s Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP), which acknowledges exemplary safety and health management systems.

Conclusion

These updates reflect OSHA’s ongoing efforts to enhance workplace safety and streamline regulatory processes. Employers should review these changes carefully and consider consulting with legal experts to ensure compliance and optimize safety strategies.

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