

OSHA Issues Report on the Impact of the Severe Injury Reporting Program

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Dr. David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labor for the ***Occupational Safety and Health Administration***, issued a new report, discussing the results of the first year of the severe injury reporting requirements. The report concludes that the severe injury reporting program has been a big success in improving safety and health in workplaces across the United States, and in helping OSHA focus its resources where most needed. OSHA recognizes, however, that more still needs to be done to reduce the number of in-patient hospitalizations and amputations in today's work places and hold employer's accountable for such severe injuries.

Under a rule that took effect on January 1, 2015, employers are required to report to OSHA within 24 hours any work-related amputations, in-patient hospitalization or eye loss. In the first full year of severe injury reporting, employers reported 7,636 hospitalizations and 2,644 amputations to OSHA. This data is from federal OSHA states only and does not include severe injuries from state-plan states that administer their own safety and health programs.

Manufacturing (26%), construction (19%) and transportation and warehousing (11%) had the greatest number of reported hospitalizations in 2015. Manufacturing (57%) and construction (10%) also had the greatest number of reported amputations in 2015. OSHA believes that most of the hazards that led to these severe injuries "are well-understood and easily prevented."

OSHA notes that the objective of the severe injury reporting program is "to encourage employers to evaluate their own processes and equipment and determine what went wrong." OSHA believes that when employers evaluate their own processes during the severe injury reporting process (rather than by OSHA through an inspection), employers are more likely to take action that will prevent future injuries.

To better manage its resources and engage employers in actively addressing safety and health, OSHA responded to 62% of severe injury reports by asking employers to conduct their own incident investigations and propose remedies to prevent future injuries to OSHA. In this approach, known as a Rapid Response Investigation, the employer is expected to investigate the causes of the severe injury and present to OSHA its findings and proposed abatement methods. With this approach, the focus is more on identifying and fixing the problem quickly versus citing employers for OSHA violations.

OSHA concludes

We have found this process to be extremely effective in abating hazards while also using far fewer OSHA resources than are required for on-site inspections. In this way, we are able to use agency resources more efficiently and, ultimately, better protect the safety and health of workers.

In a rare acknowledgment of most employer's good faith, OSHA notes most employers were eager to cooperate with OSHA and prevent future injuries and that "many went above and beyond what was required by OSHA to protect their employees."

While the program appears to be working in most instances, OSHA believes that as many as 50% of employers may not be reporting severe injuries to OSHA. OSHA bases this conclusion on injury claim numbers provided to it by state workers' compensation programs and other unidentified factors. OSHA thinks that many small and mid-size employers are not reporting their severe injuries because they either may not be aware of the new requirements or because they think the cost of not reporting to OSHA is low.

OSHA states that it is developing outreach strategies to help small and mid-size employers understand the requirements. OSHA also states it will be citing more employers for non-reporting in the second year of the program and beyond if it finds that an employer did not report amputations and hospitalizations.

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