

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha) Encyclopedia Article

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Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha)

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency charged with protecting workers' health and safety, was created by Congress in 1971 to administer the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1970. With few exceptions, including some state plans and specific industries, OSHA oversees all U.S. workers and their employers. OSHA's duty is to ensure that workplaces are free from hazards that are likely to cause serious harm or death to workers.

As part of that duty, OSHA establishes standards for workplace activities and exposures to hazardous materials. Working in conjunction with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), OSHA uses scientific data to determine acceptable levels of risk for regulated materials and creates corresponding material safety data sheets (MSDS) for each. Levels are set forth in the Federal Code of Regulations (CFR), and employers must prevent workers from being exposed above the CFR's permissible exposure limits. Although employers must oversee their own programs, OSHA requires that records be kept for all workplace exposures, illnesses, injuries, and fatalities. The agency may only regulate the employer-employee relationship, but when individuals bring lawsuits against their employers, courts will generally find the employer negligent if there has been a failure to comply with OSHA standards.

Bibliography

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2000 OSHA Handbook. (1999). PA: Chamber Educational Foundation.

Internet Resources

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Web site. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>.

Occupational Health and Safety Administration Web site. Available from <http://www.osha.gov>.