

Important safety updates



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On April 29, I had the privilege of attending Sen. Bob Casey's (D-PA) subcommittee hearing on Employment and Workplace Safety, where the subject involved the enhancement of whistleblower protection. During this hearing, OSHA Assistant Secretary David Michaels testified in support of the need to strengthen the whistleblower protection for employees. He offered the following statement:

Over the past 43 years, working with our state partners, employers, workers, unions, professionals, and others, OSHA has made dramatic progress in reducing work related deaths, injuries, and illnesses. But over 4,000 workers still die on the

job every year, and almost 4 million workers are seriously injured. Workers Memorial Day is an occasion to remind the Nation that most of these workplace injuries, illnesses, and

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fatalities are preventable.

In passing the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSH Act), Congress understood that workers play a crucial role in ensuring that their workplaces are safe, but also recognized that employees would be unlikely to participate in safety or health activities, or to report a hazardous condition to their employer or OSHA, if they feared their employer would fire them or otherwise retaliate against them. For that reason, section 11(c) of the OSH Act prohibits discrimination of employees for exercising their rights under the law. In the decades since the passage of the OSH Act, Congress has enacted a number of other statutes which also contain whistleblower provisions, acknowledging that workers are this Nation's eyes and ears, identifying and helping to control not only hazards facing workers at jobsites, but also practices that endanger the public's health, safety, or well-being and the fair and effective functioning of our government.

Whistleblowers serve as a check on the government and

business, shining a light on illegal, unethical, or dangerous practices that otherwise may go uncorrected. Whether the safety of our food, environment, or workplaces; the integrity of our financial system; or the security of our transportation systems, whistleblowers help to ensure that our laws are fairly executed.

Separately, a management attorney testified that the way to make a workplace safer is to provide employers with incentives and not penalties. Yeah, right! What greater incentive should there be to an employer than providing a safer work environment, in part brought about by employees speaking up when they observe unsafe working conditions?

Heat-related illness

As the summer heat begins, we want to remind you to protect yourselves. Many offices failed to give the heat-related safety talks over the last two years. We need you to get involved by helping to spread the word about our safety messages, so we share an excerpt from a statement made in the past by OSHA's Dr. Michaels:

...Whenever there is high heat, outdoor workers are at increased risk for heat-related illnesses and deaths. In fact, every year thousands of workers experience heat-related illnesses, and dozens more are killed by heat, and it happens in every part of the country...

The workers most at risk for heat-related illness are in construction and agriculture, but there are many outdoor workers in other industries who are at increased risk as well. These include workers in transportation, sanitation and recycling, building and grounds maintenance, landscaping services, oil and gas operations, and anyone else who does strenuous work in the open air. We need your help to get the word out to employers that they are responsible for providing workplaces that are safe from excessive heat. This means regular breaks for workers so they can cool down. It means regular access to water so workers can stay hydrated. It means training for workers on the symptoms of heat illness and what to do if they see a co-worker showing signs of dehydration or heat stroke. OSHA has five key pieces of advice:

- One: Drink water every 15 minutes, even if you're not thirsty.
- Two: Rest in the shade to cool down.
- Three: Wear a hat and light-colored clothing.
- Four: Learn the signs of heat illness and what to do in an emergency.
- Five: Keep an eye on fellow workers.

The entire text of the press conference is posted on the NALC's webpage for your review. Read it and all the heat-related illness material on the safety pages of our website and pass it along to your brothers and sisters to prevent tragedy.