

THE INJURY TIMES

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES FOR PREVENTION

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HOSPITAL SAFETY IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF OSHA'S NEW ONLINE INITIATIVE

by Gillian McGovern and Chandana Adhikarla

Agriculture and construction are safer industries to work in today than they were ten years ago. The same cannot be said for healthcare, which has one of the highest occupational injury rates among all industries this decade. Earlier this year, OSHA acknowledged the increasing injury epidemic in U.S. hospitals and nursing homes by launching the Worker Safety in Hospitals website [<https://www.osha.gov/dsg/hospitals/>]. The website outlines the scope of the problem and provides resources for employers to establish or en-

hance health and safety initiatives. The most common cause of injury is associated with activities related to patient handling. Information about programs, policies, and equipment that can cost-effectively decrease this injury burden as well as resources to monitor program evaluation are available on the website.

Health Care is one of the fastest growing industries in United States today. The Public Citizen reports that in 1997, the health care and social assistance sector employed 13.6 million people.

By 2010 that count reached 18.1 million, and by 2020 it is expected that another 5.6 million jobs will be added. OSHA's September 2013 Occupational Safety Fact-Book recorded 253,700 work-related injuries and illnesses in US hospitals. That translates to a rate of 6.8 work-related injuries and illnesses for every 100 full-time employees - almost twice the rate for private industry as a whole. In 2013, these injuries resulted in almost 2 billion dollars in workers' compensation costs.

(continued on page 4)



US FALLS BEHIND ON WORKPLACE BULLYING LEGISLATION

by Gillian McGovern

Bullying doesn't end when grade school is over. A recent study conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) found that 27% of U.S. adults have been the target of bullying at some point during their professional career. Despite over one quarter of Americans experiencing this form of repeated harassment, only 18% of employers have policies in place to address the issue. WBI

reports that the vast majority of employers either deny, discount, defend, rationalize or encourage bullying. Some companies feel that it is part of their office culture and not a problem in need of remedy. Workplace bullying has severe consequences for psychological well-being as well as physical health. The stress generated from repeated harassment can result in anxiety, depression, hypertension,

gastrointestinal distress, and other stress-related illnesses. In addition, bullied individuals are more likely to use sick days regardless of the presence of illness. For employers, these consequences result in increased health insurance costs, decreased productivity and an increased probability of incurring costly litigation expenses.

The U.S. is one of the last *(continued on page 2)*

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EMPLOYERS PUSH BACK AGAINST ONLINE INJURY REPORTING RULE

By Nabeel Qureshi

New OSHA regulations would require certain companies to make injury reports available online. As part of its "Open Government" Initiative, the Obama administration hopes to make the inner workings of government organizations open to public comment and scrutiny. Companies are already required to keep records of all on-site work injuries, but the new regulation forces employers to make all these reports publicly available. With a reduction in staff regularly checking businesses at OSHA, new regulations are

required to keep injury information up to date. New reporting regulations will reduce workplace injuries and illness by improving the tracking of these problems on a quarterly basis to reduce the backlog in OSHA inspections. This rule will not change already established record keeping practices OSHA requires for large companies, but it will add an additional online reporting regulation. Dr. David Michaels, Assistant Labor Secretary, reports three to five million workers that are injured every year. The new reporting rule will

reduce these numbers without adding an extra burden to employers. Business executives are fighting back. They contend that these reporting rules will not reduce workplace injuries, but will rather add an extra burden to the businesses and unfairly target higher-risk jobs. Small businesses, those with less than 250 employees, will be exempt from this quarterly online reporting criterion and will instead only report injuries once a year. This new regulation will not change current internal record keeping. Only large busi-

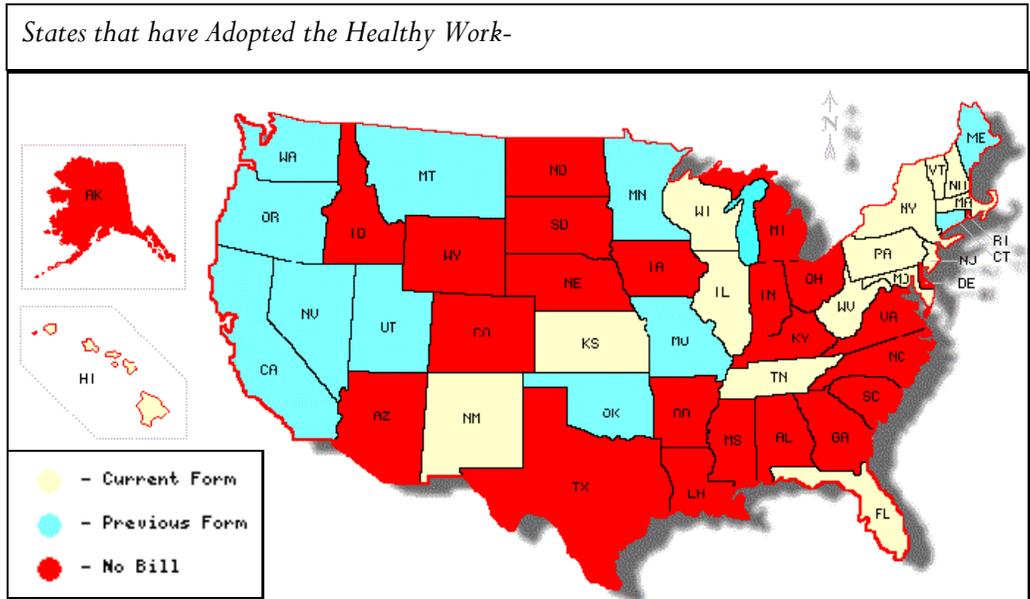
nesses with over 250 employees will be affected by these changes. A comment period was instituted with the hopes of getting ideas to streamline the reporting process. With individual and business input, the commentary should reduce the undue burden on large businesses. The extended comment period closed on March 8th. After a reevaluation of the commentary, OSHA plans to make a final decision and lay the infrastructure for the new reporting regulation.

US FALLING BEHIND (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Western countries to enact federal anti-bullying legislation for the workplace. Currently, there is a bill, entitled the 'Healthy Workplace Bill', that can be optionally adopted by each state. Since its introduction in 2001, 26 states have adopted the bill in either a past or current form. The bill provides employees with options for legal redress against the individual offenders and the employers, as well as allows them to seek compensation for lost wages. Employers benefit through guaranteed protection from liability if there are bullying prevention mechanisms in place and bullying would become a valid reason for the company to fire or sanction offenders. The WBI survey found over-

whelming national support for anti-bullying legislation - 93% of participants either "strongly supported" or "somewhat supported" a law that would legally protect workers from repeated

abusive mistreatment and protect against illegal discrimination and harassment. More information about the Healthy Workplace campaign can be found at <http://www.healthyworkplacebill.org/problem.php>.



THE SWEET SOUND OF HEARING LOSS PREVENTION BY GILLIAN MCGOVERN

Industries that necessitate a noisy workplace leave employees at an increased risk of hearing damage over the course of their tenure. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports that occupational hearing loss is the most common work-related injury in the United States.

In response to this epidemic, NIOSH, in collaboration with the National Hearing Conservation Association, created the Safe-in-Sound award for Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention. The award is

presented annually to employers who demonstrate measurable success in reducing hearing loss. Information about these achievements is disseminated to inform other industry members about cutting-edge best practices to preserve the hearing of their employees. Two Safe-in-Sound awards are given out, one for Excellence and the other for Innovation.

The recipient of the 2014 Award for Excellence is the Northrop Gumman Systems Corporation, Electronic Sys-

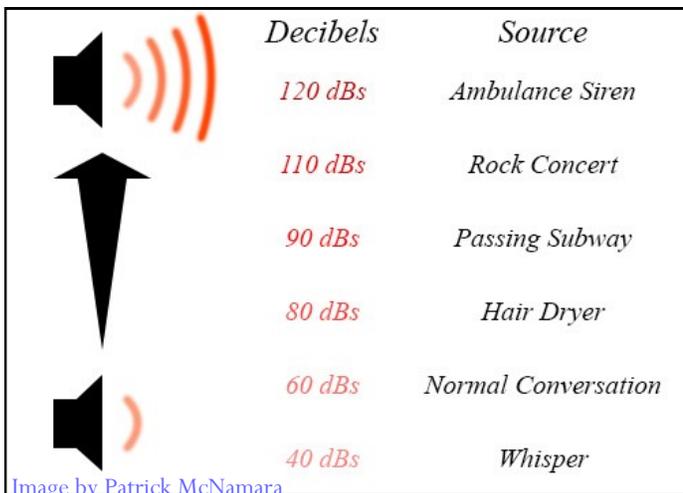
tems Sector. The Corporation devised a system to effectively identify and control hazardous noise sources that effect workers' daily routines. Because all noise cannot be eliminated, workers who are employed in areas without full sound control are also enrolled in a hearing loss prevention program. Most notable is the Corporation's public outreach effort which aims to educate the wider community about non-occupational sources of hazardous noise and reduce general noise-induced hearing loss.

The seminar has undergone wide dissemination, being employed by Universities, the US Army, and conferences in the audio science and health fields.

Hearing loss can occur from loud noises over a brief period of time, such as a gunshot, or prolonged exposure to low levels of sound, like listening to music from headphones. The CDC recommends that noise not exceed 85dBs for every eight-hour continuous exposure, length of an average work day. It is observed that with every three units increase in noise beyond 85dBs, the length of exposure necessary to cause hearing loss is cut in half.

The award for Innovation was presented to Benjamin Kanters, Associate Professor at Columbia College in Chicago and founder of Hear Tomorrow. Mr. Kanters teaches the importance of hearing conservation to students in the audio, music, and hearing science fields. His unique course content formed the basis for his two-hour seminar on the importance, mechanism, and protection of our hearing.

Individuals can decrease their risk through appropriate prophylactics when engaged in noisy activities, such as snowmobiling and hunting, as well as donning over-the-ear headphones instead of earbuds.



DEATHS SPIKE IN OIL INDUSTRY BY NABEEL QURESHI

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 138 individuals died last year while working on oilrigs. This represents the highest level and largest spike in reported deaths in this industry in the last 20 years. Most of these additional deaths occurred on onshore rigs which have more lax and less frequent safety checks.

Increasing demand for oil has led to riskier working condi-

tions and greater scrutiny of the industry and its practices. Representatives from the oil industry blame accelerated hiring and the commissioning of older rigs for the spike in fatalities. Nearly one quarter (23%) more people were hired in 2013 than in 2012 despite government sequesters significantly reducing funding for employee training. This has resulted in more

workers working in more dangerous areas with less experience.

The Safety Services Company, an organization that tracks OSHA compliance, contends that the vast majority of deaths in this industry involve preventable safety violations. Due to the inherent dangers in the oil industry, OSHA requires rigs to be inspected once a year, but have reduced

the number of inspectors employed by the organization. Inspections are often missed, postponed, or rushed due to the increased workload of remaining inspectors. The increased demand for oil, coupled with a boom in hiring and reduction in funding, create a lethal circumstance.

HOSPITAL SAFETY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

In January of this year, OSHA's Assistant Secretary and Chief, David Michaels noted, "This is not an enforcement initiative. This effort is taking the best practices that have been used successfully by hospitals all over the country and trying to disseminate them." During his statement he noted that the best way to reduce injury is to foster a culture of safety. Aside from an injury caused by patient handling, Michaels stated that workplace violence, slips and falls, exposure to dangerous chemicals, infectious diseases and needle-sticks were the other major safety concerns plaguing the healthcare workforce.

The web portal will also serve as an important educational and research tool. It contains extensive data on illness and injuries, guidelines and examples of best practices. It also features extensive data libraries with links to on-site injury and illness statistics maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to help foster research in hospital injury. The up-to-date libraries of federal workplace safety and health regulations provide employers and employees with the tools needed to create a safer workplace.

Resources available on the website will also benefit allied industries such as

pharmaceutical, chemical and hospital equipment manufacturers. Once hospitals identify the resources and equipment they need to create a culture of safety they can work with industry to obtain the necessary materials. The website makes clear that safety is a collaborative effort and that we need to start paying more attention to the well-being of the employees who take care of our health.

EPA REVISES PESTICIDE LAWS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A DECADE

BY SAMANTHA SCHILSKY

In February 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency announced a proposal to amend the agency's Worker Protection Standard last updated in 1992. Changes made will benefit agricultural workers who are regularly exposed to pesticides. Research has linked pesticide usage with cancers, poisonings and morbidity due to various chronic diseases. Agricultural workers are at an increased risk of these diseases due to their prolonged exposure to pesticides. The following are highlights of the changes proposed in the new legislation:

- Mandatory pesticide safety trainings, previously required every five years, will become annual. Trainings will cover protections afforded to farm workers under the law, access to information about personal protective equipment, procedures regarding pesticide treated fields, and instructions about reducing take-home exposure from clothes and other gear.
- A first time ever age restriction: except for family farms, workers must be at least 16-years-old to handle pesticides.
- Expanded posting of mandatory signs that prohibit entry into fields treated with the most hazardous pesticides until residue levels decline to a safe level.
- No-entry buffer areas ranging from 25-100 ft. around fields recently treated with pesticides to protect individuals against over-spray and fumes.
- Measures to improve state's abilities to enforce compliance with pesticide regulations include mandatory record keeping.
- Personal protection equipment must meet OSHA standards including fit test, medical evaluation, and training
- Accessibility of pesticide labels and Safety Data Sheets for farm workers and their advocates will be improved



When implemented, these revisions to the current regulations will hopefully reduce pesticide-induced harm among agricultural workers.

STAND DOWN: WEEK-LONG OSHA EVENT WILL HIGHLIGHT FALL FATALITY

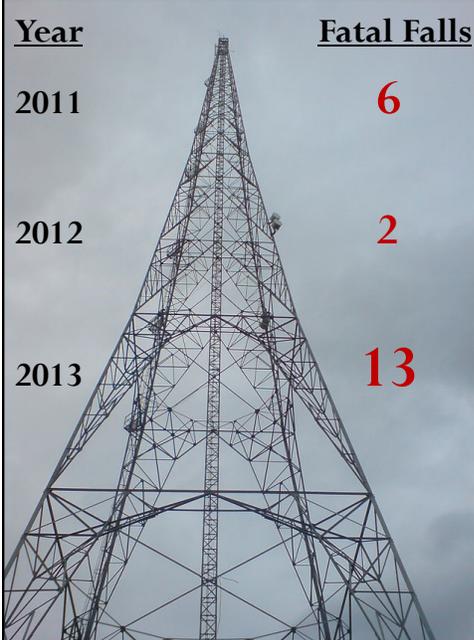
BY GILLIAN MCGOVERN

A startling trend has emerged in the broadcast and communication tower industry: more workers died in 2013 than in the previous two years combined with another 7 deaths reported as of April, 2014. Once a small niche, this industry has exploded with activity over the past few years due to the increased demand for cellular and internet service. OSHA reports that the majority of fatalities at tower sites are the result of preventable falls. Workers were wearing harnesses, but those harnesses were not anchored. The second leading cause of death was tower collapse, which usually occurred when employees were in the process of replacing structural components. In many cases the workers were given incomplete instructions about how to

perform their duties while retaining the structural integrity of the tower. Falls are the leading cause of death in the entire construction industry, accounting for 34.6% of all fatalities in this industry in 2012.

OSHA will host a National Safety Stand-Down for Fall Prevention in Construction campaign from June 2-6, 2014. Over the course of the week OSHA asks companies to voluntarily discuss fall prevention and relevant workplace safety topics. Participation is voluntary and open to all employers – even those outside the construction industry. Fall prevention and other educational resources for employers are available at <https://www.osha.gov/StopFallsStandDown/index.html>. OSHA will also host events across the country. To find

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fatal Falls</u>
2011	6
2012	2
2013	13



events in your region :<https://www.osha.gov/StopFallsStandDown/>



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The Injury Times-Serving Public Health Service Region II and Beyond

The Injury Times is primarily focused on legislative and policy issues that impact public health service Region II and beyond. Our inaugural issue focused on legislative initiatives for motor vehicle and road safety. Future issues are planned for gun and firearm safety and for pharmaceuticals and poisoning. Send story leads, articles or news to the Editor.

The geographic scope of PHS Region II covers New York, New Jersey and the tri-state more broadly. Some may also find it surprising to learn that this region also includes the territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In this and subsequent issues, we will highlight national issues for an injury prevention area in each issue with particular attention on the leading legislative efforts that are in motion to strengthen the injury prevention initiatives across Public Health Service Region II and those beyond that have lessons for us locally.

About the Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention

The Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention at Columbia University is based in the Department of Epidemiology, Mailman School of Public Health, and is funded in part by a grant from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Our mission is to improve population health by reducing the morbidity and mortality from unintentional and intentional injuries through research, dissemination and translation of scientific discoveries, development of innovative and multilevel training and education programs, and promotion of best practices and evidence-based interventions.

Our objectives are to integrate expertise and other resources across academic divisions, facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, forge diverse and far-reaching partnerships, and accelerate the advancement of science and practice in the injury control field.