Featuring CATHLEEN CHRISTENSEN

YOUR BUSINESS & OSHA STANDARDS

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT OSHA STANDARDS?
WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN EMPLOYER?
HOW DO I IDENTIFY SAFETY HAZARDS?

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INTRODUCTION

Accidents are bound to happen in busy workplaces. These accidents range from minor injuries to serious ones that sometimes end up in fatalities. Prior to 1970, there were no safety standards in place to regulate or control such incidences. The high rates of workplace accidents led to the creation of the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) agency. In this article, Cathleen Christensen, the current Vice President of Property and Casualty of Hierl Insurance, provides insight about the relationship between OSHA and employers with regard to workplace safety.

ABOUT YOUR EXPERT

Cathy’s expertise lends itself well to helping local businesses with their commercial insurance and risk management needs. Her goal for her clients is to listen and learn about their business and needs to create risk awareness and develop a program that meets and exceeds their expectations.

What Is OSHA?

OSHA is a federal government agency formed in 1970. Its main role is to set and enforce workplace safety and health standards to protect employees from workplace injuries and deaths that were rampant prior to 1970.
Today, there are about 3 million workplace-related injuries annually. This number represents a 60% reduction from the numbers recorded before OSHA was formed. This is an indication that the agency has played a significant role in improving employees’ safety and health.

**Responsibilities of the Employer in Regard to OSHA**

The regulations guiding OSHA require employers to provide a safe working environment for their employees. Cathleen points out the General Duty Clause as the main underlying standard:

> “This clause is the foundation of all current and future safety standards. The clause requires employers to provide workers with a workplace that is free from recognized hazards, that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees.”

All subsequent standards are based on this clause. If there is no safety standard, then this clause applies. Any time OSHA agents come to inspect your workplace, and you are not aware you are violating a particular safety standard, they will cite the General Duty Clause.

The clause also requires employers to comply with all OSHA safety and health standards. According to
those standards, employers should inspect and evaluate the workplace for potential hazards and train employees to work safely to prevent accidents.

How Employers Identify Safety Hazards

Cathleen notes most employers would not consider OSHA inspection a good thing. OSHA inspections are either programmed or unprogrammed. Unprogrammed inspections are carried out when something bad, such as a serious injury, happens, some danger is recorded, or there is some kind of negative report.

OSHA, in general, is a federal agency, but there are some 22 states that have their own safety standards. Employers can identify safety standards from their respective states. The states with no such safety standards, like Wisconsin, can use OSHA standards as a guideline. Employees can also report any dangers they identify in their workplaces.

Assisting Organizations in Meeting Safety Standards

It is important organizations meet the set safety and health standards to avoid incurring unnecessary expenses in OSHA fees and penalties, which can run into the thousands. At Hierl, we provide:

- Materials to help develop safety plans to protect workers from injury
- Employee reports of near-miss incidences to indicate what needs to be corrected
- A hazard analysis checklist to check for any potential hazards and eliminate them

For more information regarding this issue, you can contact Cathleen Christensen at 920-921-5921 or by email at cchristensen@hierl.com.