
CONGRESS PUSHES FOR TOUGHER SAFETY REGS

The Protecting America's Workers Act—a bill to toughen workplace safety laws—hasn't gotten anywhere in the House, even though it's been introduced several times.

But the chances of the law getting passed could be improving. That's because the Senate just introduced its own version of the bill, which would make sweeping changes to OSHA's authority and penalty structure.

Tougher Penalties

Both the House and Senate bills contain sections intended to toughen penalties on employers and managers.

One way it would do this: by giving injured workers and their families a role in OSHA citations.

They would have the opportunity to:

- Talk to OSHA before a citation is issued
- Obtain copies of important documents, and
- Make a statement before OSHA accepts a settlement.

The bill would also increase both civil and criminal penalties on Employers.

In addition the laws would:

- Expand OSHA laws to cover public employees and transportation employees, and
- Increase protections for whistleblowers.

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CONTROLLING SILICA EXPOSURES IN CONSTRUCTION

Trade Release

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WASHINGTON - [Controlling Silica Exposures in Construction](#), a guidance document recently published by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration addresses the control of worker exposure to dust containing crystalline silica, known to cause the lung disease silicosis.

The publication, intended to assist employers in providing a safe and healthful workplace, includes methods for controlling silica such as wet cutting during construction operations. Wet cutting controls silica dust generated when using hand-held saws, grinders and jackhammers. Wetting materials at the point of impact makes the dust particles heavier and more likely to stick to each other, reducing the chance of dust becoming airborne. Vacuum dust collection systems also effectively control silica by drawing dust particles away from the worker's breathing zone and depositing them into a filtered dust collection chamber.

"Workers in the construction trades not only suffer serious injuries and illnesses resulting from unsafe equipment but also from inhaling harmful dusts," said acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA Jordan

Barab. "Providing guidance for reducing potentially fatal hazards associated with occupational exposure to silica dust is one of this agency's priorities."

Employers should conduct periodic monitoring of silica exposure by testing air samples at the construction site to determine if the level of silica in the air exceeds the permissible exposure limit (PEL) outlined in the construction PEL standard. As one of OSHA's areas of emphasis, the agency has developed standards for silica to assure work practice controls are effective.

For more information, visit OSHA's Safety and Health Topics page on [crystalline silica](#).



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MONTHLY TOOLBOX TALK

UNDERGROUND UTILITY HAZARDS

Think how frustrating it is to be without power because of a storm or a downed pole. Electric, communication, gas, water and sewer lines are commonly buried, and in some areas there are buried transcontinental pipelines. When working around underground utilities it is imperative that you know where they are buried. If you dig without knowing where they are and you cut into one of these utility lines, you could be interrupting service to thousands of homes or businesses. Think of the problems that would result from cutting a power line to a nursing home, for example. In some cases, either the damage to the line or the lack of service to a customer could be a matter of life or death. To avoid catastrophe you need to call the local utility locator several days before you dig.

The tendency these days is to bury all service lines: gas, electric, telephone, and cable lines. Of course water lines and natural gas pipelines have been underground for years. Recently there has been an increase in the number of accidents caused by contractors and other excavators who fail to ensure that all underground utility lines are properly marked. Statistics show that about two-thirds of reportable accidents on natural gas pipelines are caused by excavation or construction activity. Think about the damage incurred if you cut through a buried fiber optic cable. You could be responsible for hundreds or thousands of extended service interruptions.

There are many obvious signs that underground utilities are present on the site. For example, you don't see any overhead wires. You may see a pad-mounted transformer or a utility pole with a riser. A riser is a piece of conduit that takes over-head electrical service down the pole and into the ground. A pole riser always has a warning sign facing in the direction of the path of the underground electrical service. Watch for these signs.

The locations of underground utilities are marked with color coded flags or spray-painted markings. **Red** is used for electric, **yellow** is for gas, **orange** is for communications, **blue** is for water and **green** identifies sewer lines. Respect the marks of each utility owner that has indicated the location of its underground facilities. Digging, trenching, boring, auguring and blasting are all inherently dangerous to life and property. Even

under ideal conditions with few underground utilities or other obstructions, the risk potential is high. Dig with care. This not only applies to work with big equipment, but also to individually operated tools, like post-hole diggers, jackhammers and trenchers. Even digging by hand with a spade can be dangerous. When you are approaching the location of the utility's tolerance zone, use hand tools or vacuum excavation techniques to expose the utilities. Notify the utility owner immediately if a pipe or cable is hit, even if there is no apparent damage.

Gas lines present problems beyond damage and service interruptions - namely explosions and fires. A line can be damaged and start leaking even though no cut is visible on the surface. If you smell the odor of natural gas, shut down all equipment, evacuate the area, and call 911 from a telephone **outside** of the area. The smallest spark could result in an explosion. Immediately eliminate any source of ignition, such as motorized equipment, cigarettes, matches, flashlights and anything else that could cause a spark. Do not try to fix or repair the damage, and do not cover or hide it. Allow the gas to escape into the atmosphere. Contact the gas company involved and the local fire department to alert emergency personnel. Keep bystanders out of the area.

Have underground utilities located prior to digging. You need to do this for small jobs that you do around the home too. Plan your work, contact the utility locator and remember to dig safely. Understand which utility each color represents and get help if you hit an underground utility line. The amazing thing is that accidents involving lines continue to occur, when all it takes is some preplanning and a phone call to keep you out of trouble.

Plan ahead!

Call at least 48 hours in advance to allow the utilities time to mark their lines