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US Labor Department's OSHA announces new National Emphasis Program for Nursing and Residential Care Facilities

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration today announced a new National Emphasis Program for Nursing and Residential Care Facilities to protect workers from serious safety and health hazards that are common in medical industries. OSHA develops national emphasis programs to focus outreach efforts and inspections on specific hazards in an industry for a three-year period. Through this NEP, OSHA will target nursing homes and residential care facilities in an effort to reduce occupational illnesses and injuries.

In 2010, according to the department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, nursing and residential care facilities experienced one of the highest rates of lost workdays due to injuries and illnesses of all major American industries. The incidence rate for cases involving days away from work in the nursing and residential care sector was 2.3 times higher than that of all private industry as a whole, despite the availability of feasible controls to address hazards. The data further indicate that an overwhelming proportion of the injuries within this sector were attributed to overexertion as well as to slips, trips and falls. Taken together, these two categories accounted for 62.5 percent of cases involving days away from work within this industry in 2010. For this NEP, OSHA will target facilities with a days-away-from-work rate of 10 or higher per 100 full-time workers.

"These are people who have dedicated their lives to caring for our loved ones when they are not well. It is not acceptable that they continue to get hurt at such high rates," said Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health. "Our new emphasis program for inspecting these facilities will strengthen protections for society's caretakers."

Health care workers face numerous serious safety and health hazards, and the NEP will provide guidance to OSHA compliance staff on the policies and procedures for targeting and conducting inspections specifically focused on the hazards associated with nursing and residential care. These hazards include exposure to blood and other potentially infectious material; exposure to other communicable diseases such as tuberculosis; ergonomic stressors related to lifting patients; workplace violence; and slips, trips and falls. Workers also may be exposed to hazardous chemicals and drugs.

The NEP directive can be viewed at http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive_pdf/CPL_03-00-016.pdf. Information for employers and employees in nursing homes and residential care facilities, including guidance on ergonomics and workplace violence, is available at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/nursinghome/index.html>.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>.



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