

Remarks by  
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Press Teleconference on Proposed New Rule to Improve Tracking  
of Workplace Injuries and Illnesses  
1 p.m. EST Thursday, Nov. 7, 2013

Good afternoon. Today we learned from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that three million American workers in the private sector suffered a serious injury or illness on the job in 2012. In some industries, more than one in twenty workers are injured every year. This should not be acceptable in the United States today.

The law requires many employers to keep a record of workplace injuries and illnesses. That's called the OSHA log. The purpose of the OSHA log is to help employers and workers identify hazards, fix problems, and prevent injuries and illnesses. Each year the Bureau of Labor Statistics asks a sample of employers around the country to send their OSHA logs to the BLS for the annual Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses. It is from this survey we know the injury rate in each industry — and it is how we know that private sector employers recorded about three million injuries among their workers last year. But for the most part, the information in the logs **never** leaves the workplace. We propose to change that, so that these data can play a larger role in **preventing** work-related injuries and illnesses.

It is OSHA's job to assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women. But OSHA is a small agency. With our state partners, we have about 2,400 inspectors to cover almost 8 million workplaces. It would take us close to 100 years to inspect to every workplace once. So OSHA inspections, alone, are not enough to prevent the terrible toll of workplace injuries - those three million serious injuries that occur annually. Employers must find and fix the hazards in their own workplaces, before workers get hurt, whether or not OSHA makes an inspection.

Today, OSHA is issuing a proposal to improve workplace safety and health through improved tracking of workplace injuries and illnesses. We believe the approach we propose is an effective, inexpensive and non-prescriptive way to encourage employers to reduce hazards and therefore save workers' lives and limbs.

First, let me say that this proposal does not add any requirements to keep records; it only modifies an employer's obligation to transmit these records to OSHA. The proposal requires large employers, with 250 or more employees, to electronically report to OSHA the data on serious workplace injuries and illnesses that the employers already collect. Smaller employers, with 20 or more employees, will be required to electronically report only the annual summary data that employers have already prepared. OSHA will make the data publically available, on line, after cleaning it of personally identifiable information.

How will this make workplaces safer? Public posting of workplace injury and illness information will nudge employers to better identify and eliminate hazards. Employers want to be seen as the top performers in their industry. Just as some corporations strive to demonstrate their commitment to reducing pollution, or using renewable energy, we believe that responsible employers will want to be recognized as leaders in safety.

Currently, employers cannot benchmark their performance against others in their industry; once implemented, this initiative will enable employers to compare their safety records to those at similar facilities. In addition, prospective employees will know which employers have better safety records, helping those employers compete for the most desirable workers. This initiative will not result in more OSHA enforcement. But with these data, OSHA will be able to better target our activities, by identifying the employers who most need our free consultants, our educational materials, and our health and safety inspections. This also means we can spend fewer resources, and make fewer inspections, at employers with low injury rates.

This initiative will also generate a rich body of information which will be available to researchers. I believe that through aggregating data across employers in the same industry, researchers will be able to better understand causes of injuries now occurring and

to identify emerging health hazards that would be more difficult to detect looking at the data of a single employer.

The public will have 90 days to submit written comments on the proposed rule. In addition, on January 9, 2014, OSHA will hold a public meeting on the proposed rule. More information on the public meeting will be available next week in the Federal Register and on our website. We encourage the public to participate in the rule-making process.

This proposed rule was developed following a series of stakeholder meetings held in 2010. The proposed rule is also supported by the work of OSHA's National Advisory Committee on Safety and Health (NACOSH) who, in June 2011, issued a formal recommendation to OSHA that it modernize the system for collection of injury and illness data to assure that it is timely, complete, accurate and both accessible and useful to employers, employees, responsible government agencies and members of the public.

In summary, our proposed requirement will enable employers, workers, researchers, the public, and OSHA to work together to prevent injuries and illnesses, use taxpayer dollars more efficiently, and improve the businesses' bottom line. This will be accomplished through a program whose costs are minimal. Employers are already collecting this information. The only change is that they will send the information to OSHA electronically.

Three million injuries is three million too many. We can, and we must, do better.

In developing this proposal, we looked to the best practices of employers who are the world leaders in workplace safety — and one of those employers is ALCOA. Under the leadership of Paul O'Neill, who later was appointed by President George W. Bush as the 72nd Secretary of the Treasury, ALCOA dramatically lowered its worker injury rate, while simultaneously becoming a more profitable company. ALCOA maintains its deeply held commitment to worker safety — if you go on the ALCOA website, safety holds a prominent place and ALCOA's injury statistics, updated in real time, are posted for the world to see.

I am very pleased that Secretary O'Neill has joined us on the call. He can speak to the importance of disclosing injury data in preventing work related injuries.