

# OSHA National News Release

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## OSHA Announces Comprehensive Plan To Reduce Ergonomic Injuries

### *Targeted Guidelines and Tough Enforcement Two Key Elements*

**WASHINGTON** - The Occupational Safety and Health Administration today unveiled a comprehensive plan designed to dramatically reduce ergonomic injuries through a combination of industry-targeted guidelines, tough enforcement measures, workplace outreach, advanced research, and dedicated efforts to protect Hispanic and other immigrant workers.

"Our goal is to help workers by reducing ergonomic injuries in the shortest possible time frame," said Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao. "This plan is a major improvement over the rejected old rule because it will prevent ergonomics injuries before they occur and reach a much larger number of at-risk workers."

### **Guidelines**

Occupational Safety and Health Administrator John Henshaw said his agency will immediately begin work on developing industry and task-specific guidelines to reduce and prevent ergonomic injuries, often called musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), that occur in the workplace. OSHA expects to begin releasing guidelines ready for application in selected industries this year. OSHA will also encourage other businesses and industries to immediately develop additional guidelines of their own.

### **Enforcement**

The Department's ergonomics enforcement plan will crack down on bad actors by coordinating inspections with a legal strategy designed for successful prosecution. The Department will place special emphasis on industries with the sorts of serious ergonomics problems that OSHA and DOL attorneys have successfully addressed in prior 5(a)(1) or General Duty clause cases, including the ***Beverly Enterprises*** and ***Pepperidge Farm*** cases. For the first time, OSHA will have an enforcement plan designed from the start to target prosecutable ergonomic violations. Also for the first time, inspections will be coordinated with a legal strategy developed by DOL attorneys that is based on prior successful ergonomics cases and is designed to maximize successful prosecutions. And, OSHA will have special ergonomics inspection teams that will, from the earliest stages, work closely with DOL attorneys and experts to successfully bring prosecutions under the General Duty clause.

## **Compliance Assistance**

The new ergonomics plan also calls for compliance assistance tools to help workplaces reduce and prevent ergonomic injuries. OSHA will provide specialized training and information on guidelines and the implementation of successful ergonomics programs. It will also administer targeted training grants, develop compliance assistance tools, forge partnerships and create a recognition program to highlight successful ergonomics injury reduction efforts.

## **Hispanic Outreach**

As part of the Department of Labor's cross-agency commitment to protecting immigrant workers, especially those with limited English proficiency, the new ergonomics plan includes a specialized focus to help Hispanic and other immigrant workers, many of whom work in industries with high ergonomic hazard rates.

## **Ergonomics Research**

The plan also includes the announcement of a national advisory committee; part of their task will be to advise OSHA on research gaps. In concert with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, OSHA will stimulate and encourage needed research in this area.

"Bureau of Labor Statistics' data show that musculoskeletal disorders are already on the decline. This plan is designed to accelerate that decline as quickly as possible," said OSHA Administrator John Henshaw. "Thousands of employers are already working to reduce ergonomic risks without government mandates. We want to work with them to continuously improve workplace safety and health. We will go after the bad actors who refuse to take care of their workers."

The new plan was announced barely a year after Republicans and Democrats in Congress rejected the previous Administration's rule, which was developed over a period of eight years and was broadly denounced as being excessively burdensome and complicated. Over the course of the last year, the Department of Labor conducted three major public forums around the country and met with scores of stakeholders, collecting hundreds of sets of written comments and taking testimony from 100 speakers, including organized labor, workers, medical experts, and businesses.

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