OSHA® FactSheet

Voluntary Protection Programs

Created in 1982, OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs recognize and partner with businesses and worksites that show excellence in occupational safety and health. Sites are committed to effective employee protection beyond the requirements of OSHA standards. VPP participants develop and implement systems to effectively identify, evaluate, prevent, and control occupational hazards to prevent employee injuries and illnesses. As a result, the average VPP worksite has a lost workday incidence rate at least 50 percent below the average of its industry. OSHA removes participants from programmed inspection lists.

Scope

All groups covered by OSHA, including federal agencies, are eligible to join the Voluntary Protection Programs. Each worksite that applies must show a commitment to effective safety and health management systems and work to be an industry leader in occupational safety and health.

General Requirements

An effective, ongoing safety and health program. OSHA believes an effective safety and health management system is the best way to prevent occupational illnesses and injuries. By meeting performance-based criteria, the VPP participant is expected to use a comprehensive system geared toward each worksite's needs. Management leadership and employee participation, in addition to company self-evaluations, are key elements of this process. Annual self-evaluations measure success and identify areas needing improvement.

Cooperation. VPP emphasizes trust and cooperation among OSHA, the employers, employees and employee representatives. Since 1982, this cooperation – and the excellent protection found at VPP sites – complements the agency's enforcement activity without replacing it, allowing the agency to focus its inspection resources on higher-risk establishments. Although VPP sites are exempt from programmed inspections, employers and employees retain their rights and responsibilities under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Good performance. Voluntary Protection Programs participants are selected based on their written safety and health management system and ongoing performance. OSHA also conducts a thorough on-site evaluation to judge how well the site's protective system is working, including a review of site injury/illness rates. Continuous improvement is expected.

Star

The Star Program is designed for exemplary worksites with comprehensive, successful safety and health management systems. Companies in the Star Program have achieved injury and illness rates at or below the national average of their respective industries. These sites are self-sufficient in their ability to control workplace hazards. Star participants are reevaluated every three to five years, although incident rates are reviewed annually.

Merit

Merit is an effective stepping stone to Star. Merit sites have good safety and health management systems, but these systems need some improvement to be judged excellent. Merit sites demonstrate the potential and the commitment to meet goals tailored to each site and to achieve Star quality within three years. However, each Merit site is limited to one three-year term unless a second term is approved by the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health. On-site evaluations occur every 18 to 24 months.

Star Demonstration

The Star Demonstration program is designed for worksites with Star quality safety and health protection to test alternatives to current Star eligibility and performance requirements. Promising and successful projects are considered for changes to Star requirements. Star Demonstration program participants are evaluated every 12 to 18 months.

OSHA Responsibilities

Application review. Each applicant undergoes a review of its safety and health programs. The multi-stepped on-site review requires about four days, depending on the size of the facility and complexity of the operations. In addition to a review of records, logs and inspection history, the on-site review includes an initial meeting with management staff and employees, a walk-through of the facilities to determine hazards and precautions, formal and informal interviews, and a closing meeting to discuss findings and recommendations. Current employees of a VPP site can serve on an evaluation team by volunteering for an OSHA training course and becoming a Special Government Employee.

Evaluation. Star Demonstration sites are evaluated every 12 to 18 months, Merit sites every 18 to 24 months, and Star sites every three to five years. Injury and illness rates are compared to national averages. Merit sites must show a commitment toward gaining Star status within three years.

Contact person. OSHA assigns a VPP site representative to each VPP workplace to provide ongoing guidance and assistance.

Inspections. Participation in VPP does not eliminate the rights or responsibilities of employers or employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. OSHA enforcement inspections will result from valid complaints, workplace accidents or fatalities, chemical leaks and spills and other significant events.

All states with approved occupational safety and health programs offer VPP programs. A list of states with approved programs is available at OSHA's website. For further information about a specific state program, contact the state program directly.

For more information on joining VPP, contact OSHA's Office of Partnerships and Recognition at (202) 693-2213 or the VPP Manager at your OSHA Regional Office.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

For more complete information:

OSHA® Occupational Safety and Health Administration

U.S. Department of Labor
www.osha.gov
(800) 321-OSHA

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