



Health & Safety

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OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs

More than 56,000 Americans lose their lives every year, most resulting from workplace exposure. Accidents and injuries account for 6,500; the remainder is attributed to diseases contracted at work. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) claims that, since its creation 27 years ago, it has cut fatalities in half. There is still much to be done. OSHA's ultimate

goal is to instill in management a commitment to health and safety in the workplace, to engage the energy, talent and imagination of workers in that pursuit, and to send every working man and woman who goes to work today home safely to their families.

Employers who develop effective health and safety programs and show results by lowering their injury and illness rate will have a partner in OSHA. The Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) sites are the models for the best in partnerships for excellence in workplace health and safety.

Eligibility in VPP

Industries with effective safety and health programs that have lower-than-average injury rates for their industries are eligible for OSHA's VPPs—known as the Star, Merit or Demonstration program. Participation in one of these programs exempts a worksite from OSHA's *programmed* inspections.

General Requirements

The central element that qualifies a company for participation in one of the VPPs is an ongoing safety and health program. Participants in the Merit and Star programs are expected to have comprehensive programs, including such elements as employee participation and annual comprehensive self-evaluation.

Major Elements

Major elements of an effective occupational safety and health program include:

- Top management commitment in implementing the program so that all will understand that

management's commitment is serious.

- Employee involvement in the structure and operation of the program and in decisions that affect their safety and health, to make full use of their insight and energy.
- Assignment of responsibilities for all aspects of the program, so that managers, supervisors and employees in all parts of the organization know what performance is expected of them.
- Provisions of adequate authority and resources to responsible parties, so that assigned responsibilities can be met.
- Holding managers, supervisors and employees accountable for meeting their responsibilities, so that essential tasks will be performed.
- Annual reviews of program operations to evaluate their success in meeting the goals and objectives, so that deficiencies can be identified and the program revised when objectives are not met.
- Worksite analysis, to include identifying all hazards by conducting baseline worksite surveys for safety and health and periodic comprehensive update surveys, regular inspections, and safety and health training to ensure employees are aware of and understand the hazards to which they may be exposed.

Cooperation

A cooperative atmosphere is essential to make voluntary protection work. Collective bargaining agents representing employees must favor employee participation in the company's program. Both employers

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and employees retain their rights and responsibilities under OSHA.

Good Performance

The company must demonstrate its efforts to minimize injury and illness in the workplace. Two indicators used are the Bureau of Labor Statistics injury incidence and lost workday injury rates.

VPP Designations

Star Program

The Star Program is open to companies that are in the forefront of employee protection as indicated by three-year average incidence and lost workday care rates at or below the national average for their industry. Star participants are evaluated every three years, and incidence rates are reviewed annually.

Merit Program

Merit is an effective stepping stone to the Star Program. Participants in Merit have more general management systems, but must set goals for

meeting Star requirements. They have less stringent rate requirements, but must agree to goals for reducing rates below the average for their industry. They are evaluated on-site annually.

Demonstration Program

The Demonstration Program provides alternative health and safety approaches that are not currently available under VPP. If alternative approaches are successful, they may be considered for inclusion in the Star Program.

OSHA Responsibilities

Each applicant undergoes an on-site review of its safety and health program, examination of records and logs, review of inspection history and an assessment of site conditions. The on-site portion takes about four days.

Evaluation

Annual evaluations for Merit and Demonstration participation and three-year evaluations for Star participants compare the injury and/or

illness rates to industry rates, and determine that the companies continue to meet their requirements.

Inspections

OSHA retains responsibility for inspections in response to formal, valid employee complaints, significant chemical leaks and spills, and workplace fatalities and catastrophes.

Where to Get More Information

The more than 221 companies that have joined the programs provide protection to 337,000 workers, and have enjoyed increased profits associated with reductions in injury and illness.

For applications or further information, write OSHA Voluntary Protection Program, Room N3700, Frances Perkins DOL Bldg., 200 Constitution Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20210; or refer to: *Federal Register*, Vol. 53, No. 133, July 12, 1988, pp. 26339–26348, “Voluntary Protection Program.” **P&SF**

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