

BRIEFLY...

Highlights of Report Number 02-14-201-10-105, issued to the Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health.

WHY READ THE REPORT

Since 1982, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has used the Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) to establish cooperative relationships with businesses and their workers to help prevent fatalities, injuries, and illnesses; and to officially recognize worksites with exemplary safety and health management systems. Once approved for VPP, a worksite was exempt from OSHA programmed inspections as long as it complied with program requirements and maintained exemplary systems.

To ensure VPP participants maintained exemplary systems, OSHA evaluated the systems while selecting, reevaluating, and monitoring worksites. First, a worksite submitted an application to OSHA describing its systems and opened itself to agency scrutiny that included an onsite evaluation by a team of safety and health experts. Second, OSHA conducted periodic onsite reevaluations to ensure participants maintained the requirements of the program. Third, OSHA monitored the participant between onsite reevaluations by reviewing their annual self-evaluation report, following up on inspections, and performing other oversight activities.

WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT

We conducted a performance audit of VPP for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 to answer the following question:

- Does OSHA have sufficient controls for the selection, timely reevaluation, and monitoring of VPP participants?

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology, and full agency response, go to:

<http://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2014/02-14-201-10-105>.

December 16, 2013

VOLUNTARY PROTECTION PROGRAM: CONTROLS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO ENSURE ONLY WORKSITES WITH EXEMPLARY SAFETY AND HEALTH SYSTEMS REMAIN IN THE PROGRAM

WHAT OIG FOUND

OSHA did not have sufficient controls to ensure VPP worksites maintained exemplary occupational safety and health systems.

- 13 percent of participants had injury and illness rates above industry averages or were cited with violations of safety and health standards, but most of these participants were allowed to remain in the program. Moreover, OSHA policy allowed participants with injury and illness rates above industry averages to potentially remain in the program for up to 6 years, raising serious questions as to whether the companies were fully protecting their workers.
- 11 percent of participants were not evaluated in a timely manner. Policy had timeliness requirements for onsite evaluations, but OSHA's existing processes did not effectively ensure compliance.
- OSHA could not identify the universe of participants or applicants because it tracked VPP data in at least 11 different databases that were not reconciled; and data ranged between 1,743 to 1,859 for participants, and 19 to 274 for applicants.
- OSHA used unreliable injury and illness data to evaluate participants and in reported program statistics. For a judgmental sample, 60 percent of reported rates differed significantly (by more than half) from source documents.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

The OIG made recommendations to the Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health covering policies, controls, and oversight so OSHA can better ensure only VPP participants with exemplary safety and health systems remain in the program.

OSHA agreed with the recommendations, but stated it generally followed its policies and procedures and most VPP sites had exemplary safety and health systems.