

BRIEFLY...

OSHA COULD DO MORE TO ENSURE EMPLOYERS CORRECT HAZARDS IDENTIFIED DURING INSPECTIONS

WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT

OSHA is responsible for the safety and health of 130 million workers employed at more than 8 million worksites nationwide. For calendar year (CY) 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported 4,836 workers were killed on the job in the United States. Furthermore, OSHA estimates an additional 50,000 workers die each year from illnesses they contract as a result of workplace-related chemical exposures.

For fiscal year (FY) 2015, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued 80,825 citations for violations of safety and health standards that impacted approximately 950,000 workers. It is critical that OSHA ensures employers take action promptly to address the dangers it identifies.

WHAT OIG DID

We conducted a performance audit to answer the following question:

Did OSHA ensure employers took adequate and timely abatement actions in response to safety or health violations it cited during inspections?

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology, and full agency response, go to: <https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2017/02-17-201-10-105.pdf>.

WHAT OIG FOUND

OSHA did not ensure employers took adequate and timely abatement actions for an estimated 12,808, or 16 percent, of safety or health violations the agency had cited in FY 2015.

For approximately one-third of all abated citations OSHA issued during FY 2015, employers abated the hazard during the inspection or within 24 hours of OSHA identifying the hazard. However, for hazards that were not abated immediately, OSHA took an average of 81 days from the inspection date to issue a citation, and it took even longer to issue repeat and willful citations. This is primarily because the OSH Act allows up to six months for OSHA to issue a citation for any type of hazard. Employers are not required to abate a hazard until they receive a citation. As a result, hazards were not abated for an average of 86 days after the inspection date.

In addition, abatement of hazards identified at construction sites remained a challenge for OSHA. OSHA closed 16 percent of sampled construction site citations, not because the employers had corrected the hazards, but because the construction projects had ended. As a result, OSHA had no assurance the cited construction companies had corrected the identified hazards on subsequent construction sites.

Finally, we found one-third of 200 sampled citations lacked evidence that OSHA had conducted history searches to identify past violations. Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) should conduct a search of past violations as part of their determination on whether to issue a citation for a repeat or willful violation. These more serious types of violations require the employer to provide additional documentation of abatement, such as photographs or receipts for equipment repairs.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

To better ensure workplace hazards are corrected, we recommended the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health adjust or better enforce its policies on abatement documentation, timeframes for issuing citations, abatement verification at smaller construction sites, and documentation of employer history searches. OSHA's comments on a number of the findings and recommendations did not change our report.