OSHA issues final rule updating walking-working surfaces standards and establishing personal fall protection systems requirements

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration today issued a final rule updating its general industry Walking-Working Surfaces standards specific to slip, trip, and fall hazards. The rule also includes a new section under the general industry Personal Protective Equipment standards that establishes employer requirements for using personal fall protection systems.

"The final rule will increase workplace protection from those hazards, especially fall hazards, which are a leading cause of worker deaths and injuries," said Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Dr. David Michaels. "OSHA believes advances in technology and greater flexibility will reduce worker deaths and injuries from falls." The final rule also increases consistency between general and construction industries, which will help employers and workers that work in both industries.

OSHA estimates the final standard will prevent 29 fatalities and more than 5,842 injuries annually. The rule becomes effective on Jan. 17, 2017, and will affect approximately 112 million workers at seven million worksites.

The final rule's most significant update is allowing employers to select the fall protection system that works best for them, choosing from a range of accepted options including personal fall protection systems. OSHA has permitted the use of personal fall protection systems in construction since 1994 and the final rule adopts similar requirements for general industry. Other changes include allowing employers to use rope descent systems up to 300 feet above a lower level; prohibiting the use of body belts as part of a personal fall arrest system; and requiring worker training on personal fall protection systems and fall equipment.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education, and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov.

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