

NEWS BRIEF

Provided by: Connor & Gallagher OneSource

2018 Fatality and Catastrophe Inspections Up, but Other Numbers Down in Annual OSHA Enforcement Summary

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated the most fatalities and catastrophes in over a decade during the 2018 fiscal year, but overall inspections were down slightly.

In total, OSHA conducted 32,023 inspections in 2018, a 1.2% decrease from the 32,408 in 2017. But, 941 of those were fatality or catastrophe investigations, which amounted to a 12.4% increase compared with the 837 a year earlier. That figure also represented the highest since OSHA looked into 1,043 such cases in 2007.

Total inspections have been consistent and hovering around the 32,000 mark in recent years. OSHA conducted 35,820 inspections in 2015, but the numbers have dropped to 31,948 in 2016, 32,408 in 2017 and 32,023 in 2018.

Get With the Program?

One noteworthy trend in recent years has been the rising amount of unprogrammed inspections by OSHA.

Unprogrammed inspections refer to employee complaints, injuries and fatalities, and referrals. In 2018, approximately 56% of the agency's 32,023 inspections were unprogrammed.

As recently as the 2013 fiscal year, approximately 57% of OSHA's 39,228 total inspections that year were programmed. Programmed inspections are geared toward industries in which it is known that

hazards exist, such as chemical processing and construction.

At 56%, 2018's relative number of unprogrammed inspections is the second-highest percentage in the last six years after approximately 60% were unprogrammed in 2016. According to OSHA, the figure indicates that the agency is committing considerable resources to responding to referrals and complaints.

941 of those were fatality or catastrophe investigations, which amounted to a 12.4% increase compared with the 837 a year earlier. That figure also represented the highest since OSHA looked into 1,043 such cases in 2007.

Help Is on the Way

While total inspections have stayed relatively steady in the last three years, according to the National Employment Law Project (NELP), the number of OSHA inspectors reached a record-low of 875 as of Jan. 1.

During a congressional appropriations hearing in April, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) cited retirements, resignations and a hiring freeze during the first year of the Trump administration as reasons for the shortage.



NEWS BRIEF

In the 2018 fiscal year, OSHA hired 76 new inspectors, also known as compliance safety and health officers (CSHOs). The Department of Labor is planning to hire 26 new full-time equivalent inspectors for the agency as well.

At the aforementioned April hearing, former U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta said that he believes OSHA inspections will increase as new inspectors gain experience. Acosta noted that it could take one to three years before the new CSHOs will be ready to work in the field on their own.

The Enforcement Weigh-in

OSHA's Enforcement Weighting System (EWS) was established for the 2016 fiscal year and uses enforcement units to measure the amount of resources that must be committed to different types of inspections. A set number of units are assigned to different tasks with the goal of the EWS being to emphasize the effort needed for inspections at workplaces with some of the most dangerous hazards, such as heat, chemical exposures, workplace violence and process safety management.

Overall, enforcement units were down slightly in 2018 to 41,796 from 41,829 the year prior. The total number of enforcement units has decreased every year since the system's inception in 2016 when OSHA tallied 42,900.

Of the 41,796 units, 28,259 were attributed to nonweighted inspections, which are assigned 1 unit per case. Fatality/catastrophe is worth 3 units and accounted for the second-most during the 2018 fiscal year at 2,730. Personal sampling inspections count for 2 units; therefore, OSHA's 1,302 cases led to 2,604 units.

Despite being worth only 1/9 units per case, the 19,266 inspections into phone/fax complaints

generated 2,134 enforcement units. On the other end of the spectrum, process safety management is assigned 7 units per case, the most in the EWS, and its 231 inspections accounted for 1,617.

Click [here](#) more statistics regarding enforcement units, total inspection numbers and OSHA's official 2018 fiscal year enforcement summary.