



## Workplace Safety

### **Workplace Safety and Health Issues Affect Your Workplace Too**

#### **Safety and Health in the Workplace Affects Everyone**

What type of setting do you think of when you consider workplace safety and health issues? Large industrial plants? Construction sites?

You may not realize it, but safety and health issues affect almost all workplaces, whether you work on a construction project, handle goods on a loading dock, or work in a Member's personal office. Evacuation plans, fire safety, ergonomic issues, and physical hazards as simple as improper electric connections are all workplace safety and health issues. Even furniture can present a hazard if, for example, it blocks access to an emergency exit.

Because it affects everyone, workplace safety and health should be a priority for every employee and employer, and you should understand your rights and responsibilities.

#### **Workplace Safety and Health Rights in Congress**

The Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) requires that the Legislative Branch comply with the Occupational Safety and Health Act and its standards requiring that the workplace be free of hazards that are likely to cause illness or injury. Both employing offices and employees must comply with these workplace safety requirements.

The General Counsel of the Office of Compliance is responsible for investigating suspected unsafe working conditions and prosecuting violations of workplace safety standards. An investigation of a suspected unsafe working condition may be requested by either an employing office or a covered Legislative Branch employee.



#### **What You Should Know as an Employee**

What can you as an employee do to help make your workplace safe? First, be sure you understand your rights. Visit our web site at [www.compliance.gov](http://www.compliance.gov), or contact the General Counsel's office to learn more.

Second, make a commitment to safety in your workplace. Ask questions about potential safety and health risks, and be willing to point out potential hazards. By being vigilant, you may be able to prevent an accident before it occurs.

If you suspect an unsafe working condition exists in your workplace,

be sure to inform your employer. You also have a right to contact the General Counsel of the Office of Compliance – anonymously if you so choose – to request an inspection.

#### **What You Should Know as an Employer**

One of the most important steps you can make as an employer is to put in place a zero tolerance policy for workplace hazards and injuries, and ensure that you communicate that commitment to your employees. Be receptive to hearing employees' concerns about safety hazards in your workplace. Remember that vigilance by your employees can be one of the best preventative measures against workplace injuries that can cost you money or lost productivity.

Don't forget the less obvious workplace safety issues. Emergency evacuation planning is a critical safety and health issue for every office on Capitol Hill. The CAA requires that all employing offices have an up-to-date emergency action plan (EAP) and that your employees must be knowledgeable about the plan. If you do not have an EAP or are unsure of whether you need one, contact the Capitol Police or the appropriate authority in the House or Senate. You may also consult our web site, [www.compliance.gov](http://www.compliance.gov), for more information. We have guidance on preparing EAPs, as well as a form-fillable template you can use to create an EAP customized for your office.

## Advancing Safety and Health on Capitol Hill

In February, the Office of Compliance conducted the first ever Capitol Hill-wide conference on workplace safety and health in Congress. Over fifty participants representing a wide spectrum of Congressional employing offices attended the half-day conference.

Entitled “Advancing Safety and Health on Capitol Hill,” the conference featured panel discussions and expert speakers in the field of workplace safety and health.



Assistant Secretary of Labor John L. Henshaw

The primary focus of the conference was to encourage the development of comprehensive organizational safety and health programs. These programs integrate all safety functions under one hat, and are a well established management best-practice in the Executive Branch and all major private sector corporations. By implementing a comprehensive plan and program, organizations improve the overall coordination of



Rep. John Larson

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards.

OSHA standards were applied to the Legislative Branch with the passage of the CAA in 1995.

### Expertise and Sage Advice

Alan McMillan, President of the National Safety Council, gave the conference’s keynote address on the importance of comprehensive safety and health programs for all employers. McMillan offered conference participants a powerful reason why workplace safety is so important: Not only is it good for employees, “Good safety and health is good business.”

Assistant Secretary of Labor John L. Henshaw also addressed conference participants. Henshaw, the Administrator of OSHA, encouraged participants to make safety and health a core value in their organization, adding that workplace safety can never be over emphasized. Echoing Alan McMillan, Henshaw reminded the audience that compliance with safety

workplace safety training and compliance, ultimately reducing the amount of time lost due to health and safety concerns and reducing violations of

standards adds value to organizations and cuts losses due to on-the-job injuries.

Congressman Chris Shays (CT-04) and Congressman John Larson (CT-01) attended the conference in the afternoon and offered participants their view on the importance of the passage of the CAA in 1995 and the great strides that have been made in reducing workplace injuries and in improving Legislative Branch workplace safety since the Act’s passage. Rep. Shays was a lead sponsor of the CAA in the House of Representatives.

This conference is the first of many the Office of Compliance plans to offer Legislative Branch employees and employing offices on various topics relating to the CAA and workplace rights.



Rep. Chris Shays and Office of Compliance Board of Directors Chair Susan S. Robfögel

The Office of Compliance thanks Congressman Bob Ney (OH-18) and the staff of the Committee on House Administration for their assistance in organizing this conference.



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The Office of Compliance advances safety, health, and workplace rights in the U.S. Congress and the Legislative Branch. Established as an independent agency by the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995, the Office educates employees and employing offices about their rights and responsibilities under the Act, provides an impartial dispute resolution process, and investigates and remedies violations of the Act.

This information does not constitute advice or an official ruling of the Office of Compliance or the Board of Directors and is intended for educational purposes only. For further information, please refer to the Congressional Accountability Act (2 U.S.C 1301 et seq.) and the regulations issued by the Board, or you may contact the Office of Compliance.