

**US Department of Labor's OSHA withdraws proposed interpretation on occupational noise**  
*Agency examines other approaches to prevent work-related hearing loss*

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration today announced that it is withdrawing its proposed interpretation titled "Interpretation of OSHA's Provisions for Feasible Administrative or Engineering Controls of Occupational Noise." The interpretation would have clarified the term "feasible administrative or engineering controls" as used in OSHA's noise standard. The proposed interpretation was published in the *Federal Register* on Oct. 19, 2010.

"Hearing loss caused by excessive noise levels remains a serious occupational health problem in this country," said Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health. "However, it is clear from the concerns raised about this proposal that addressing this problem requires much more public outreach and many more resources than we had originally anticipated. We are sensitive to the possible costs associated with improving worker protection and have decided to suspend work on this proposed modification while we study other approaches to abating workplace noise hazards."

Michaels met earlier this month with the offices of Sen. Olympia Snowe and Sen. Joseph Lieberman, members of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, in response to a letter from the senators. Sens. Snowe and Lieberman are also co-chairs of the Senate Task Force on Manufacturing.

Thousands of workers every year continue to suffer from preventable hearing loss due to high workplace noise levels. Since 2004, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that nearly 125,000 workers have suffered significant, permanent hearing loss. In 2008 alone, BLS reported more than 22,000 hearing loss cases, and Michaels emphasized that OSHA remains committed to finding ways to reduce this toll.

As part of this effort, the agency will:

- Conduct a thorough review of comments that have been submitted in response to the *Federal Register* notice and of any other information it receives on this issue.
- **Hold a stakeholder meeting on preventing occupational hearing loss to elicit the views of employers, workers, and noise control and public health professionals.**
- Consult with experts from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the National Academy of Engineering.
- Initiate a robust outreach and compliance assistance effort to provide enhanced technical

information and guidance on the many inexpensive, effective engineering controls for dangerous noise levels.

For small businesses, OSHA's On-site Consultation Program offers free and confidential advice on health and safety solutions with priority given to high-hazard worksites. Through this program, small and medium-sized employers can obtain free advice on addressing noise hazards. On-site consultation services exist in every state, and they are independent from OSHA's enforcement efforts. On-site Consultation Program consultants, employed by state agencies or universities, work with employers to identify workplace hazards, provide advice on compliance with OSHA standards, and assist in establishing safety and health management systems.

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 assure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>.