

Oregon OSHA encourages employers to take a ‘Safety Break’

Spring is in the air – and while the season may be synonymous with deep cleaning, it also is the perfect time to recognize and address workplace health and safety hazards. In furtherance of this goal, Oregon OSHA is encouraging employers and workers across the state to participate in its 19th annual “Safety Break for Oregon” on May 11, 2022. The event calls on employers and workers to take a day to cultivate workplace safety by identifying and eliminating potential hazards.

What is Oregon OSHA’s Safety Break?

In 2003, Oregon OSHA introduced Safety Break as a response to a notable increase in workplace deaths the previous year. To address this concern, Oregon OSHA agreed to organize and promote a day dedicated to safety awareness. Every year since, Safety Break has called on employers across the state to spend time engaging workers in a conversation about safety and to renew their focus on identifying and eliminating hazards.

While OSHA requires employers to furnish a place of employment “free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm,” such hazards are not uniform across all workplaces. Thus, Safety Break activities are intended to be flexible and are determined by the respective needs of the employer, its employees and the specific work site.

For example, OSHA has promulgated minimum requirements specific to employees in certain industries like construction and agriculture, among others. Almost every year, the most violated construction



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rules include fall protection requirements, ladder use requirements, documentation of safety committee meetings, and compliance with the written hazard communication program. Meanwhile, the most violated agriculture rules include inadequate sanitary facilities for hand labor work, living areas and site requirements for agricultural labor housing, a lack of safety committees or safety meetings, and absence of a written hazard communication program. While there are commonalities between violations in these respective industries, there also are numerous differences. Thus, employers should consult OSHA’s guidelines for their specific line of work, and tailor their Safety Break activities accordingly.

What are the benefits of participation?

As a natural consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers and employees have become increasingly concerned with health and safety in the workplace. By participating in Safety Break, employers can demonstrate their commitment to workplace health and safety to their employees and the community in which they do business. In addition to preventing or eliminating potential hazards, valuing workplace safety can translate to stronger community and business relationships. It can also positively influence recruitment of

new employees, reduce workers’ compensation and insurance costs, and increase worker productivity.

In addition to these obvious benefits, participating employers that sign up for the event by Friday, May 6, will be entered to win one of three \$100 checks to be used for a luncheon of their choice. The Oregon Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) alliance is the sponsor of the random drawing.

What are some activity ideas for employers?

Participating employers should use Safety Break activities to instruct employees in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions, as well as the regulations applicable to their work environment, to control or eliminate any hazards or other exposure to illness or injury. While workplace health and safety are clearly serious matters, creating safer workplaces does not have to be a bleak or onerous task. Here are some ideas employers can use for their Safety Break activities:

- talk with employees about existing hazards and other safety concerns they may have, and then find out where injuries are occurring and discuss how to eliminate them;
- focus on relevant topics to the worksite,

such as safe driving, hazard evaluation, or emergency preparedness;

- recognize and reward employees who have positively contributed to workplace safety;
- recognize and support the efforts and accomplishments of the safety committee;
- develop or revise forms for accident investigations;
- develop or revise forms for safety meetings and committee minutes;
- host a hazard scavenger hunt or conduct a mock accident investigation and offer prizes for those who come up with the most hazards;
- host a contest for the best health and safety checklist;
- play workplace safety “Jeopardy,” focusing on site-specific hazards and solutions;
- establish an accident investigation tool kit with necessary items for investigating accidents or near misses (forms, disposable camera, tape measure, etc.); and
- present a safety workshop organized by the safety committee.

For more information about how to participate in OSHA’s Safety Break event, visit <https://osha.oregon.gov/safetybreak>.

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