Complex OSHA Inspections to Get More Attention under New ‘Enforcement Weighting System’

October 13, 2015

The number of process safety management compliance inspections at oil refineries and chemical plants, as well as inspections involving workplace violence and ergonomics, are likely to increase under a new inspection strategy launched October 1 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

“All inspections aren’t equal — some are complex and require more time and resources — and many of those inspections have the greatest impact,” OSHA chief Dr. David Michaels said during a September forum at the National Safety Council conference. “This new system will help us better focus our resources on more meaningful inspections.”

Instead of merely counting individual inspections, under OSHA’s new “Enforcement Weighting System,” each inspection will be assigned “Enforcement Units.” Routine inspections, such as construction site inspections that take only a few hours, will count as one unit, while inspections that take longer and are more complex could receive up to nine units. The agency said the values are based on historical data and will be monitored and adjusted as necessary.

The change will encourage enforcement personnel to take on complicated inspections without worrying about whether they are meeting goals for individual inspections, Michaels said, as reported by Bloomberg BNA. “I think you’ll see more complex inspections and more impactful inspections, because we haven’t spent as much time and resources on those areas,” the Assistant Secretary said at the conference.

Telephone inquiries made by area office staff when responding to severe injury reports sent to OSHA also will count as enforcement units, Michaels added, according to Bloomberg BNA. Beginning January 1, 2015, OSHA mandated that it must be notified of any amputation, eye loss or worker hospitalization. Currently, phone inquiries prompted by those notifications are not calculated into inspection counts.

The change comes after two years of analysis. A workgroup selected from national and field staff calculated how long it took to conduct different types of inspections and assigned them a comparable number of enforcement units.

Bloomberg BNA reported that, since 2011, Michaels has discussed the need to conduct more health and complicated inspections. In appropriations requests for fiscal years 2014 and 2015, he told Congress the agency was considering making the change. Michaels was unable to say what OSHA’s goal will be for enforcement units for the new fiscal year, which began October 1, the news agency reported, because OSHA’s budget for fiscal 2016 has not yet been set by Congress. OSHA conducted 36,163 inspections in fiscal year 2014 (the year of the last federal government shutdown) and 39,271 inspections in fiscal year 2013.
The National Operations Center serves as the firm’s central administration hub and houses the firm’s Facilities, Finance, Human Resources and Technology departments.