

Lake County Contractors Association

Safety News

July, 1998

OSHA Inspections Up - OSHA inspections increased almost 8% for the period October 1, 1997 through March 31, 1998. Over 15, 800 inspections were made during the period. This included 75 "significant" cases where penalties were expected to exceed \$100,000, and three egregious cases where employers are cited based on the number of employees exposed to a hazard.

Over half the inspections have been made in the construction industry and the total number of violations cited increased 68%. These increases indicate that OSHA is not only applying its resources on an increased scale, it is also targeting sites where the need is most.

Does OSHA Make A Difference? - According to the Employment Policy Foundation (EPF) -- No! While workplaces have become safer since OSHA's creation, according to the EPF, this would have occurred anyway. In fact, workplace fatalities have been declining for at least 35 years before OSHA. In the 1930's, there were nearly 40 fatalities per 100,000 workers each year. By 1970, the year the OSHAct was passed, the fatality rate had already dropped to 18 and in 1996, the fatality rate was 5. According to the EPF, the reduction in fatalities is more likely due to economic growth that replaces dangerous jobs with safer ones.

EPF also argues that OSHA regulations and inspections have little impact on the fatality rate just because of the nature of workplace fatalities. According to EPF, 60% of all workplace fatalities are caused by highway accidents or workplace violence. Finally, EPF notes that over the last 20 years, the reduction of injuries and illnesses has been approximately 1 to 3 percent. In fact, the incidence of serious workplace injury and illnesses was exactly the same in 1973 as in 1996 -- and non-serious injuries have fallen only slightly.

For more information, visit EPF at their web site at epf.org/index.html.