

TOP OSHA CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2017

As the final quarter of 2016 progresses, many organizations are looking ahead to the new year. Amidst the flurry of activities that will accompany a change in presidential leadership, healthcare entities must remain focused on compliance tasks that keep patients and staff safe and secure. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Standards represent one area where organizations should remain vigilant.

Here are some key OSHA considerations healthcare organizations should be aware of as 2017 draws near:

- **Recordkeeping and reporting** An initial task is to learn about the changes made to OSHA's injury and illness recordkeeping and reporting rule—the agency is introducing new electronic requirements. Although the rule does not apply to every healthcare organization, it is worth taking the time to study the changes and determine whether compliance is necessary for your practice.

Stericycle offers a [webinar](#) that explores how the regulation relates to healthcare. OSHA also has an [introductory page](#) on its website devoted to the topic.

- **Bloodborne Pathogens** The Bloodborne Pathogens Standard is arguably the most significant OSHA requirement for healthcare organizations. Even though there are no new regulations in this area for 2017, compliance should remain a top priority as it is something with which many entities struggle. In fact, the **overwhelming majority** of OSHA citations for healthcare facilities pertain to this requirement.

As such, organizations should be focused on establishing strong policies and training programs. In addition, they should be monitoring compliance to identify and resolve potential shortfalls.

- **Hazard Communication** Along with the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard, the Hazard Communication Standard is another of the most frequently cited rules for healthcare organizations. Together, the two regulations account for the majority of all healthcare penalties from OSHA.

OSHA has been working since 2012 to align the Hazard Communication Standard with the United Nations **Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS)**. The Hazard Communication Standard now includes updated criteria for classifying health, physical and environmental hazards and specifies information that organizations must use to communicate these hazards.

As a result of the alignment process, in June 2016, OSHA finalized the requirement for compliance with the Hazard Communication Standard in three primary areas that affect healthcare employers. The first addresses the labels that manufacturers put on hazardous chemicals. The second deals with pictograms—visual icons that indicate different types of hazards, such as the skull and crossbones, which denotes acute toxicity. Based on the GHS requirements, OSHA adopted eight pictograms, including ones that represent corrosives and flammables. Finally, OSHA now mandates a specific format for safety data sheets. Until recently, the agency had not demanded a particular configuration; however, OSHA is now requiring manufacturers to adopt the GHS format.

In addition to basic Hazard Communication training that was already a requirement, organizations should be training their staff on the updated requirements, including what to look for on labels, how to interpret pictograms and what information is included in the safety data sheets. The good news is that organizations do not need to create new safety data sheets on their own. Stericycle has an online service where providers can easily download the new sheets.

THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF COMPLIANCE

While meeting OSHA Standards has always been important, organizations should be especially attentive to these requirements now. Not only is it the right thing to do for staff and patients, but the financial consequences of non-compliance just got more severe. OSHA has recently received the go-ahead to increase its **penalties** by more than 70 percent. So, for example, a 2016 penalty of \$7,000 could grow to more than \$12,000 in 2017.

Organizations can avoid these penalties while ensuring the safety and health of their staff by refocusing their efforts on OSHA, striving to remain continuously compliant.



TOP TIPS



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