

Since June of 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Labour (MOL) has been targeting enforcement measures in a campaign that they are dubbing “Safety Blitzes”. These are part of the province’s four-year plan called Safe At Work Ontario. The purpose of the safety blitz is to increase awareness and compliance among employers for high-risk activities in various sectors at specific times. The first blitz was launched in July where the target was young workers and electrical safety on construction sites. In August, the target was safety at demolition sites. In September, the focus is industrial workplaces with fall hazards, and in November they will blitz electrical hazard control and lockout.

The MOL uses workplace records and injury statistics to help determine which employers to target for each of these blitzes. Once inside the targeted workplaces, MOL officers have full authority to inspect and issue orders for any contravention of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and regulations that they see.

Preparation

The law requires employers to be aware of the hazards in their workplaces, provide information, supervision, and adequate measures to protect the safety of its workers. Understanding the severity of workplace hazards is key to determining the appropriate measures that are required. A gap assessment is a useful tool that can help apply this process. See http://www.pandrs.com/files/Prevention_Planning.pdf.

During an inspection, the MOL officer will ask to see training records for the hazards in question, such as safe use and inspection of fall protection equipment and ladders. He may also ask to see written procedures for hazard prevention, especially if specified in the regulations, such as when locking out electrical installations or equipment (Reg 851, S. 42.) A worker member of the safety committee or representative will be asked to accompany the inspection to help gain a full picture of the situation.

Interestingly, a similar blitzing approach can also be an effective tool within organizations for introducing or revitalizing workplace improvement programs. Implementing each blitz requires written preparation, visual notification, training sessions, and follow-up inspections. Involvement by workers, supervisors, managers, and safety committee members will help create a “buzz” for each topic, and drive home the message. This is truly a win-win situation, helping to protect workers from hazards, supervisors and managers from liability, and employers from high costs of accidents.

Staying Up to Date

The MOL publishes informative news releases regularly on their website at <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/news/index.html>. Despite the political rhetoric embedded within these releases, they are an excellent source of regulatory and enforcement information for employers to be aware of and prepare for. If you need information, expertise, or assistance with compliance, prevention methods or training, please call PandRS.