



Go Beyond OSHA Compliance

When you think of some of the biggest hazards faced by employees in a given workplace, you have to put “air quality” right up there near the top. To be in compliance with OSHA (“OSHA Legal”) for airborne hazards, you have to comply minimally with the permissible exposure limits (PELs) that have largely been unchanged since 1970. As a safety and health professional, it is imperative to our employees’ health that we fully understand all the data available to help us review the dangers of the chemicals we breathe. Science research data has improved dramatically over the last 40 plus years and there are hundreds of chemicals that we realize employees should not be breathing at what OSHA still currently views as acceptable (implying you are not in violation of their standard).

Taking proactive steps to go beyond compliance may need convincing of senior management, so having good documentation demonstrating the dangers and ramifications of exposure is beneficial. While keeping employees healthy is the right thing to do, there is always the potential for legal ramifications by not understanding the true dangers of certain chemicals (say if an employee were to get sick and claim it was due to workplace exposure). Here are a few of the organizations that post allowable exposure limits to various chemicals based on their own criteria:

PEL – (permissible exposure limit – OSHA)

REL – (recommended exposure limit – NIOSH)

TLV – (threshold limit value – ACGIH)

OEL – (occupational exposure limit – TSCA – part of the EPA)

While OSHA is trying to catch up on updating their PELs (i.e., respirable crystalline silica, hex chromium, etc.), the bureaucratic process for updating regulatory codes will always be several steps behind doing the right thing for our employees in a timely manner. The safety professional needs to realize other data exists that can be incorporated into their safety and health program.

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