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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-379](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal workers' compensation costs exceeded \$1.5 billion in 2004, with approximately 148,000 new claims filed that year. Because of concerns for the safety of federal workers, as well as the costs associated with unsafe workplaces, GAO described the characteristics of federal agencies' safety programs and the implementation challenges they face, and assessed how well the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) oversees and assists federal agencies' efforts to develop and administer their safety programs.

What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Labor should direct OSHA to conduct targeted inspections of federal facilities; track disputed violations through OSHA to their resolution and ensure that unresolved disputes are reported to the President; conduct evaluations of the largest and most hazardous agencies as required; and include in OSHA's annual report to the President an assessment of each agency's safety program and recommendations for improvements.

GAO received written and/or technical comments from several agencies. Labor generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations. In addition, other agencies generally agreed with the findings.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-379.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert Robertson, (202) 512-9889 or robertsonr@gao.gov.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH

OSHA Could Improve Federal Agencies' Safety Programs with a More Strategic Approach to Its Oversight

What GAO Found

Based on a survey of 57 agencies, GAO found that most agencies reported having at least one activity for each of the six components generally associated with a sound safety program—(1) management commitment, (2) employee involvement, (3) education and training, (4) identification of hazards, (5) correction of hazards, and (6) medical management (which includes having a return-to-work program for injured employees). However, agencies faced implementation challenges that cut across the components in the areas of data management, accountability, and safety resources. The survey results indicated that many agencies do not have automated systems for tracking elements of their safety programs, such as training. In addition, several of the agencies did not demonstrate that their managers are held accountable for maintaining effective safety programs. Finally, many agency officials stated that, due to limited resources, they often must depend on safety officers with limited professional safety experience.

Forest Service Smokejumpers Fighting a Blaze at Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Idaho



Source: Buck Nelson.

OSHA's oversight of federal agencies' safety programs is not as effective as it could be because the agency does not use its enforcement and compliance assistance resources in a strategic manner. Although inspections are one of OSHA's primary enforcement tools, it does not conduct many inspections of federal worksites or have a national strategy for targeting worksites with high injury and illness rates for inspection. Furthermore, although OSHA is responsible for tracking violations that agencies dispute and reporting any unresolved disputes to the President, OSHA does not track these disputed violations or their resolution. In addition, although OSHA is required to review agencies' safety programs annually and submit a report on them to the President each year, as of January 2006, the last report submitted was for fiscal year 2000. Finally, while OSHA has a range of compliance assistance programs designed to help agencies comply with its regulations and improve safety, these programs are not being fully utilized.