

## **More Information on the Oregon VPP**

### **The Purpose of the Oregon Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP)**

The purpose of VPP is to emphasize the importance of, encourage the improvement of, and recognize excellence in employer-provided, employee-participation, and generally site-specific occupational safety and health programs. These safety and health programs are comprised of management systems for preventing or controlling occupational hazards. These systems not only ensure that Oregon OSHA standards are being met, but using flexibility and creativity in striving for excellence, go beyond the standards to provide the best feasible protection for workers at that site.

Because VPP quality companies have taken their safety and health management systems well beyond the requirements of the standards, Oregon OSHA resources are not tied up in helping these companies become self-sufficient in safety management. They do that on their own and with outside assistance. By approving an applicant for participation in the Oregon VPP, Oregon OSHA recognizes that the applicant is providing, at a minimum, the basic elements of ongoing, systematic protection of workers at the site. Therefore, when employers achieve approval for participation in VPP, they are removed from programmed inspection lists. This also frees up Oregon OSHA resources for visits to establishments that are less likely to meet the requirements of OSHA standards.

### **What is Star and Merit?**

Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) recognizes a select group of facilities that have designed and implemented outstanding health and safety programs. Star participants meet all VPP requirements. Merit participants have demonstrated the potential and willingness to achieve Star program status, and are implementing planned steps to fully meet all Star requirements.

### **Will my program qualify?**

The Oregon Voluntary Protection Program is open to Oregon employers who have been in business at least one year and who have a safety committee. Construction projects longer than 30 months may also apply. VPP companies aren't expected to be perfect, but as a minimum must have a comprehensive safety and health management system that is functioning well. Additionally, the applicant's three-year average total case incidence rate and three-year combined overall average injury and illness lost workday case incidence rate must be at or below the Oregon rate for that industry.

### **How can I participate?**

If you feel your safety and health management system will qualify, you are encouraged to obtain an Oregon Voluntary Protection Program Guidelines and Application Packet. This can be obtained directly from the Oregon OSHA VPP web page or it can be ordered directly by calling the Oregon OSHA VPP/SHARP Program Manager at (541) 776-6016.

Prepare your application as instructed, and submit two copies of the written application to the Oregon OSHA VPP/SHARP Program Manager  
1840 Barnett Rd., Suite D  
Medford OR 97504-8293.

During the formal application process, Oregon OSHA expects each company to describe its safety and health program in detail, addressing the required elements for a strong safety and health management system. In your application, the more clearly you describe how you have implemented these elements at your worksite, the more quickly and appropriately Oregon OSHA can respond to your application.

### **If I'm approved, what happens then?**

If your company's application is approved for the VPP program you will receive a notice and we will agree to a time for an on-site visit. Your company is then removed from routine scheduled inspection lists for the duration of your participation. Employees lose none of their rights in this process and Oregon OSHA will still investigate major accidents, valid formal employee complaints, and chemical spills.

### **What happens when Oregon OSHA comes on-site?**

VPP on-site inspections are different than compliance inspections or consultations. Oregon OSHA safety specialists and industrial hygienists spend from three to four days (or more if necessary) examining the worksite to evaluate the effectiveness of your systems for the prevention of injuries and illnesses. Hazard identification is a very small part of the process. A thorough examination of the written safety and health program is conducted to ensure that it's comprehensive in nature and provides protection to employees against all hazards and potential hazards that may exist in the workplace.

### **What happens after we are in the VPP?**

At the next scheduled assessment, Oregon OSHA ensures that your program is continuing to work effectively. Essentially, Oregon OSHA expects each VPP program site to effectively administer their own safety and health program.

### **What are some of the benefits?**

The following benefits have been cited by current Oregon VPP participants:

- Improved employee motivation to work safely, leading to better quality and productivity.

- Reduced workers' compensation costs.

- Recognition in the community.

- VPP participant sites generally experience from 60 to 80 percent fewer workday injuries than expected of an "average" site of the same size and industry.

### **How does Oregon OSHA benefit from the VPP?**

It's important to be able to identify those companies who have exemplary programs, and be able to have them serve as mentors to other organizations. Additionally, compliance officers who have participated in VPP on-site teams indicate they've gained considerable knowledge from the experience, and have asked to participate again.

### **What does organized labor think of VPP?**

Organized labor has, "in all of their contracts," the mandate to ensure their members work in the safest environment possible. Labor believes that meaningful employment involvement, joint responsibility, and safety program consistency can be achieved through the VPP process.

Employee involvement is one of the cornerstones of VPP. The VPP process requires meaningful employee involvement in the safety and health program at all worksites. Without employee support, a company cannot participate in VPP.

If the site is unionized, with employees organized into one or collective bargaining units, the authorized representative for each collective bargaining unit must sign a signed statement indicating the collective bargaining unit(s) either support VPP participation or that they have no objection to the site participating in VPP. Without such concurrence from all such authorized agents, Oregon OSHA will not accept the application.

Additionally, the VPP application process calls for the company to submit with the application, a copy of any agreements between management and the collective bargaining agent(s) concerning safety and health.

Gary A. McDonough and the Executive Board of Local 13 of the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers(AWPPW) provided the following statement:

*"Organized labor in the Oregon Pulp & Paper industry has been a motivating factor behind the VPP in Oregon. Labor saw the need for improvement in occupational safety and health, but past history with the manufacturer's did not give us confidence in opening lines of communications. We needed a third party to help us develop new safety programs, improve safety raining, secure management commitment and hold labor and management accountable. The Oregon-OSHA VPP gave us the tools we needed to help us become successful.*

*The Voluntary Protection Program is not a generic safety program. VPP calls for a site-specific management system to identify and correct hazards and improve the safety process at a workplace. It's a roadmap for a successful safety program.*

*VPP is a partnership. Labor, management and government committed to working together and recognizing that safety and health are basic worker rights. All workers should be expected to go home, after a day on the job, as healthy and whole as when they went to work. VPP helps us codify these rights.*

*VPP is a journey an a challenge that takes the politics out of safety, strengthens the commitment to safety, and furthers awareness among all employees. VPP challenges us all to be safer today than we were yesterday, and to be safer tomorrow than we were today."*

The unions represented include; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; the United Plant Guard Workers of America; the United Food and Commercial Workers of America; the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers; the American Flint Glass Workers Union; the International Union of Operating Engineers; the Freeport Metal Trades Council; the United Paper Workers International; the International Association of Machinists; the Sheet Metal Workers International Association; the Teamsters; the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers; the Office and Professional Employees International; and the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades.