

Health and Safety

# RESOURCE

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The background of the entire page features a dark blue silhouette of a person in a defensive posture, with one arm raised to block a strike. The background is a gradient of dark blue to orange. Overlaid on this are various terms related to workplace violence in a light orange, semi-transparent font: 'hitting', 'cutting', 'slashing', 'strangulation', 'shooting', 'kicking', 'beating', 'sexual assault', 'threats', 'stabbing', 'shoving', and 'verbal assault'.

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Meet Patrick Cowan, sales manager, and Adam Wasniewski, quality and safety manager, for Timber Products Company - Spectrum Division

# Resource

Oregon Health and Safety Resource is published every other month by the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Department of Consumer and Business Services.

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**Department of Consumer and Business Services**  
Cameron Smith, Director

**Oregon OSHA**  
Michael Wood, Administrator

**Resource editor**      **Editor**  
Aaron Corvin              Mark Peterson

**Designer**  
Ron Conrad

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## Oregon OSHA moves forward in addressing question of “reasonable diligence”

By Michael Wood

Earlier this week, Oregon OSHA formally proposed a rule addressing the question of how to assess an employer's knowledge of a violation. The particular issue of concern is the statutory requirement that an employer be held responsible for a violation “unless the employer did not, and could not with the exercise of reasonable diligence, know of the presence of the violation” [ORS 654.086(2)].

In December 2014, the Oregon Supreme Court specifically addressed the phrase “reasonable diligence,” at least as it appears in the Oregon Safe Employment Act. In responding to a Court of Appeals ruling in the November 2013 CBI Services case, the Supreme Court ruled that the earlier decision's finding that Oregon OSHA must determine whether the employer “should have known” of the violation after taking into account a specific series of factors was in error. The Supreme Court concluded that the “reasonable diligence” language of the statute did not convert the word “could” to “would” and that the test remained whether the employer “could have” known of the violation “with the exercise of reasonable diligence.”

More important for the purpose of this proposed rulemaking, the Supreme Court concluded that the phrase “reasonable diligence” is what it described as a “delegative” term. The agency is expected to define such terms and their application in the context of the statute, and that the courts are expected to defer to

the agency's interpretation if it falls “within the range of discretion allowed by the more general policy of the statute.” With regard to the criteria identified by the Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court said that such criteria “may well aid in explaining how ‘reasonable diligence’ factors into a determination of an employer's constructive knowledge. But the question of which, if any, of those factors matters is one that the legislature has delegated in the first instance to the agency.”

In order to meet the challenge implicit in the words above, Oregon OSHA began discussions about potential rulemaking shortly after the Supreme Court decision. Those discussions ultimately occurred in a number of venues, and explored a number of potential approaches. Not everyone agrees that we should address the issue by rule. Even fewer agree with any particular approach we have explored. And that means that, as we take this proposal forward, we do so recognizing that we have not reached a consensus product – nor is such a consensus likely. But it is also important to recognize that the discussion has not concluded. In the formal rulemaking context, it is just beginning. What Oregon OSHA did this week is file a [proposed rule](#), which triggers a series of public hearings and an extended comment period. The comments received will then need to be considered and the arguments made in them evaluated. Only then will we reach a decision on whether to adopt the rule

as proposed, to adopt a modified version of the rule, or to return to the drawing board.

But our focus throughout these discussions will remain where it should be, and the decision will be based on a relatively straightforward (although not necessarily simple) question: How will such a rule affect our ability to protect workers in the state of Oregon from serious injury, illness and death? ●



Oregon OSHA  
Administrator





# Don't miss.....

In light of public health concerns involving the coronavirus outbreak, the following changes have occurred:

- The Region X VPPPA has cancelled the 2020 event in Boise. Please mark your calendar for the next Northwest Safety & Health Summit **May 18-20, 2021**, at the Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick, Wash.
- The Blue Mountain Conference planning team has cancelled the 2020 event in Pendleton. Please mark your calendar for the next Blue Mountain Safety & Health Conference **June 7-8, 2021**, at the Pendleton Convention Center in Pendleton, Ore.

## April 21, 2020 – Medford

**8 a.m.** Accident Investigation

**1 p.m.** Root Cause Analysis



## NORTHWEST SAFETY & HEALTH SUMMIT

**May 12-14, 2020**

The Boise Centre and  
the Grove Hotel  
Boise, Idaho

This summit is designed for all industries and worksites, even if they are not in the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP). Operations personnel, program/project managers, safety managers/coordinators, and safety committee members will benefit from this world-class workplace safety training and networking.

**Register now!**

[safetyseries.cvent.com/vpp20](https://safetyseries.cvent.com/vpp20)

To receive registration materials, exhibitor information, or sponsorship information for the 2020 event, contact the Conference Section:

[oregon.conferences@oregon.gov](mailto:oregon.conferences@oregon.gov) | 503-947-7411  
Visit [safetyseries.cvent.com/vpp20](https://safetyseries.cvent.com/vpp20) and [regionxvpppa.org](https://regionxvpppa.org)

## Failure and Success, They Aren't that Different!

**June 1 & 2, 2020**

Pendleton Convention Center • Pendleton, OR

Safety leadership workshop (June 1) ..... \$30  
First Aid/CPR/AED certification (June 1) ..... \$50  
Conference (June 2, includes lunch) ..... \$95  
Forklift Round-Up competitor fee (June 1) .... \$75

**Keynote by Bob Edwards, the H.O.P. Coach**



The 14<sup>th</sup> annual event focuses on helping organizations strengthen their safety culture. Topics featured include:

- Electrical Safety Program
- Safety Committees
- Hazard Identification
- Confined Space
- Risk Assessment
- Marijuana and the Workplace
- De-escalation techniques
- ... and more!

**For more information:** [osha.oregon.gov/edu](https://osha.oregon.gov/edu)

**For the most recent public education schedule updates:** [osha.oregon.gov/edu/workshops](https://osha.oregon.gov/edu/workshops)

To receive registration materials, exhibitor information, or sponsorship information for the 2020 events, contact the Conference Section: [oregon.conferences@oregon.gov](mailto:oregon.conferences@oregon.gov) | 503-947-7411 | [osha.oregon.gov/conferences](https://osha.oregon.gov/conferences)



## Did you know?

Oregon OSHA requires employers to report work-related injuries or illnesses that cause the loss of an eye, an amputation or avulsion that includes bone or cartilage loss, in-patient hospitalization, catastrophe, or fatality, including fatalities from heart attacks and motor vehicle accidents.

### All employers must report:

Within **eight hours**:

- All work-related fatalities and catastrophes

Within **24 hours**, a work-related:

- In-patient hospitalization
- Amputation or avulsion
- Loss of an eye

Go [online](#) to get a fact sheet and contact information about reporting work-related incidents.

### Quotable

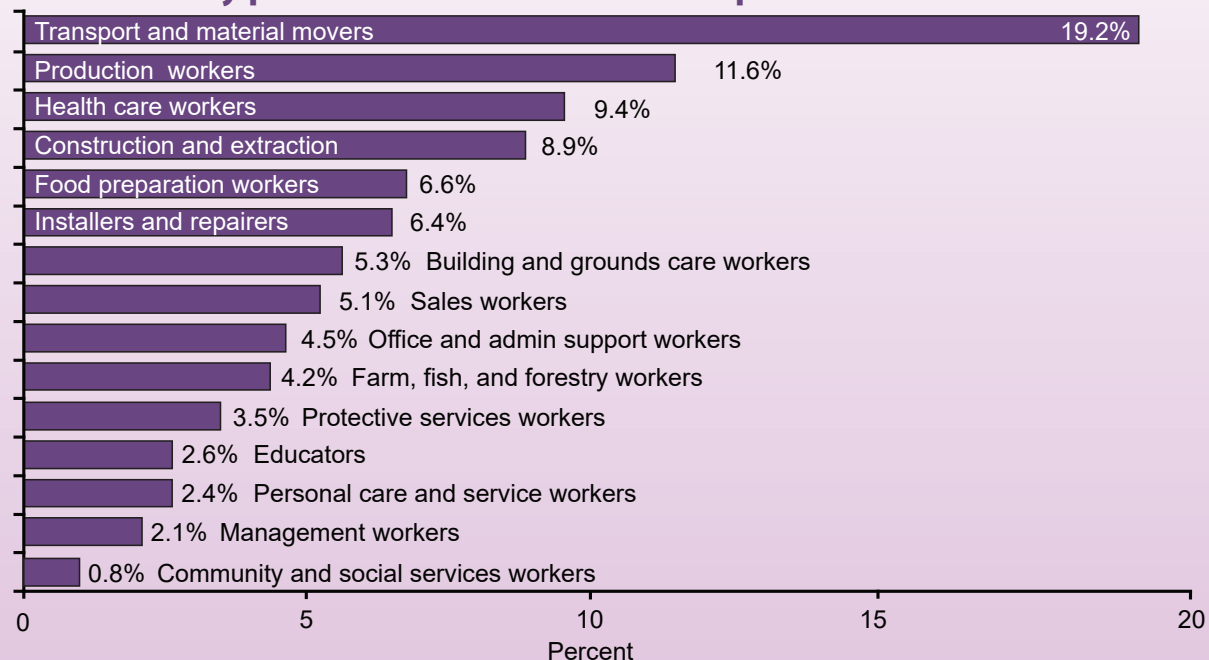
*"All your friends, family, and coworkers go through it, not just you."*

– **Matt Pomerinke**, a papermaker and public speaker, on the accident that changed his life. He was 21 years old and working at a lumber mill when his arm was caught in an unguarded conveyor drive chain and ultimately amputated just below the elbow.

## Datapoints

In 2018, the most commonly injured worker occupation was transportation and material movers. Combined with production workers, these categories comprised approximately 30 percent of all accepted disabling claims.

### MOST FREQUENT OCCUPATIONS OF INJURED OREGON WORKERS by percent of 2018 workers' compensation claims



Note: Excludes seven claims where industry was not reported. Because of rounding, percents may not sum to 100.

## Workplace violence: Prevention is paramount

By Ellis Brasch and Aaron Corvin

It's no secret that preventing hazards from cropping up in your workplace is critical to keeping people safe and healthy.

But the focus on prevention is perhaps no more crucial than when it comes to addressing the complexities inherent in a rising problem: [workplace violence](#).

It's not a risk you can easily engineer out with a machine guard.

"When we're talking about workplace violence, we're talking about risk reduction," said Linda Patterson, a senior health compliance officer for Oregon OSHA who has investigated numerous workplace violence cases. "We're never in a position where we can entirely eliminate the risk of violence, because we're addressing issues involving human behavior, which can be unpredictable."

But there are steps employers and workers can take to meaningfully reduce the risks of workplace violence, Patterson said, and to effectively decrease the severity of injuries when they do occur. The larger idea, she said, is for supervisors, line staff, and staff assistants – whether they're working in a school, health care, or other work setting – to regularly share information so they can better understand the people and settings they interact with.

This kind of understanding can then inform decisions about whether workers may need personal protective equipment or specialized training or other resources to address certain situations, Patterson said.

The health care industry, no stranger to the problem of workplace violence, has long been building its understanding of the issue and how to address it. In Oregon, hospitals, ambulatory surgical units, and home health care facilities are required to address the potential for workplace violence by conducting a hazard assessment, creating a prevention plan, providing training, and documenting violent incidents.



Such steps are examples of actions employers and workers – not just those in the health care industry – may take to increase awareness and protection, and to reduce the risks associated with violent behavior. Indeed, the best violence prevention programs take time to build and require commitment from managers and staff. They are long-term projects that can translate to fewer injuries, lower workers' compensation costs, reduced risk of lawsuits, and better working conditions for stressed-out staff.

In fact, two recent actions – one involving an Oregon OSHA investigation of violence at a Portland-area school, the other a response by the division to a request from the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) – show why those steps are so important.

### Exemption removed

Three years ago, OSEA made a stunning point: School staff injury rates caused by aggressive, violent students were increasing, so much so that they were higher than the injury rate for workers in the nonresidential construction industry.

In making that point, the association asked Oregon OSHA to remove schools and educational support services from the list of low-hazard industries in its record-keeping rule (437-001-0700) that are not required to record workplace injuries and illnesses.

## Workplace violence: Prevention is paramount

The exemption, OSEA noted, meant that violence incidents in schools were not being documented and were often being ignored – even when they required immediate medical attention.

In response, Oregon OSHA removed schools and educational support services from the list of low-hazard industries. Beginning Jan. 1, 2018, school officials were required to record injuries on the OSHA 300 Log of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses.

A few months before that change took effect, a teacher at a Portland-area school was hospitalized when a student struck her in the head with a chair. Oregon OSHA learned about the injury only after a concerned person notified the division about the incident. The results of Oregon OSHA's investigation make a compelling case for an effective violence prevention program and the need to document violent incidents so employers can prevent them from happening again.

### How the incident happened

The Portland-area school had 29 employees and served 39 special-needs students in kindergarten through the eighth grade. Four staff members – a teacher, an educational assistant, a skills trainer, and an educational assistant-in-training – were assigned to a classroom with eight students.

Normally, three staff members were assigned to a classroom: a teacher, an educational assistant, and a skills trainer. The educational assistant-in-training was an observer and had worked at the school for only two days.

Educational assistants help students with homework or other learning tasks and are assigned to a specific classroom. Skills trainers intervene and respond to students who are acting aggressively; they are issued radios and also respond to requests for help from other classrooms.

The teacher, educational assistant, and skills trainer all had Oregon Intervention System (OIS) training; Oregon requires OIS training for staff who work with people who have special needs and may express potentially dangerous behavior.

The skills trainer left the classroom to answer a radio request for assistance in another room. Then, the educational assistant left with a student, followed by the educational assistant-in-training, who went to lunch.

Only the teacher remained in the classroom with the remaining students. Then, the situation deteriorated. One of the students, who did not want to participate in a classroom activity, threw a book on the floor. As the teacher walked toward the student to pick up the book, the student threw his headphones at her. When the teacher bent down to pick up the book and the headphones, the student struck her in the head with a chair.

The teacher was admitted to Oregon Health & Science University in Portland with a frontal subarachnoid hemorrhage, a forehead laceration, and post-trauma stress.



### Why did it happen?

#### **No workplace violence prevention program**

The school did not have a workplace violence prevention program. The school did have a “Threats of Violence” program, but that program addressed violence among students, not violence directed toward staff.

The school had a “Behavior Incident Form” that was completed for each student who engaged in physical abuse or intimidation. However, when Oregon OSHA questioned the school’s human resources director about who was responsible for training employees about the form, the director said she assumed it was the responsibility of the teachers’ union.



## Workplace violence: Prevention is paramount

### Staffing protocols

There was no school policy prohibiting a staff member from being alone in a classroom with students.

There should have been a teacher, an educational assistant, and a skills trainer in the class with the students. However, the skills trainer left the room to answer another call for assistance, and the educational assistant left the room with one of the students. The educational assistant-in-training, who was on his second day of work, left the room to go to lunch. The teacher remained in the classroom with the remaining students.

### Unreliable communication

All staff members had a radio they could use to call for assistance; skills trainers used radios to respond to calls for assistance from other classrooms. However, there were times when radios were turned off or the batteries were dead. It was also difficult to understand what was said over the radios.

### Incomplete accident investigation

Management officials at the school, human resources staff, and a member of the districtwide safety committee did not know about Oregon OSHA's requirement that safety committees are responsible for establishing [accident investigation](#) procedures.

The school's executive director investigated the incident. However, the investigation did not include statements from the injured teacher. And there was no follow-through to ensure that the accident investigation findings were passed on to the safety committee.

### Safety committee lacks members

During the six months before the incident, the school's [safety committee](#) did not have the minimum number of members. Because the school had more than 20 employees, there should have been at least four members on the safety committee. There were only two members on the committee when the incident happened.

### Failure to report an in-patient hospitalization

The injured teacher was admitted to a hospital, but the school did not report the incident to Oregon OSHA. (Employers [must report](#) in-patient hospitalizations, amputations and avulsions, and loss of an eye to Oregon OSHA within 24 hours.)

### The components of effective prevention

Effective violence prevention programs have clear goals for preventing violence, are compatible with the size of the organization, and are adaptable to changing situations. The key elements – similar to the elements of traditional safety and health programs – require:

- Management commitment to the program
- Employee participation in the program
- Identifying situations that may become violent
- Establishing effective methods for preventing violence behavior
- Training workers so they know how to assess potentially violent situations and how to report violent incidents
- Keeping accurate records of assaults, corrective actions, and patient histories
- Regularly evaluating the program to ensure that it stays effective



Oregon OSHA can cite employers who do not protect their employees from workplace violence under the provisions of the Oregon Safe Employment Act. The division can also inspect workplaces in response to complaints, referrals by other agencies, and when an employee dies on the job or is admitted to a hospital for a workplace injury.

## Six steps toward reducing the risk of workplace violence

1. Identify possible causes of violence of in the workplace and determine how they could be prevented.
2. Prepare a workplace violence prevention program and ensure employees are familiar with it.
3. Establish procedures for employees to follow when they are threatened with violence.
4. Periodically evaluate employees' jobs to identify situations that could become violent.
5. Identify safe rooms or other safe places where employees can go when they are threatened with violence.
6. Ensure employees are trained so they know:
  - a. How to recognize the earliest stages of a possible assault.
  - b. How to avoid or reduce the risk of potential violent encounters.
  - c. How to get help if violence is imminent. ●





# Ask Oregon OSHA

**We are a small Oregon-based business that has six employees (one full time, three part time, and two temporary). We have been filling out the OSHA 300 Log and 300A Summary and posting the 300A Summary – but are we required to do this every year?**

Because your company does not have more than 10 employees, you do not have to keep an OSHA 300 Log or post the 300A Summary. However, tracking workplace injuries and illnesses is a good idea, and you can continue to keep a yearly OSHA 300 Log and post the 300A Summary if you want.

This is also a good time to remind Oregon employers about Oregon OSHA's recordkeeping requirements. Here is a summary of what you need to know and do:

Establishments not in a low-hazard industry and that have more than 10 employees in Oregon at any time during the calendar year, including temporary and part-time employees, must:

- Document any recordable injury or illness on the OSHA 300 Log.

- Summarize that information each year on the OSHA 300A Summary.
- Post the OSHA 300A Summary where employees can see it, no later than Feb. 1 each year and keep it posted until April 30. For example, employers who were required to keep an OSHA 300 Log in 2019 must post the 2019 300A Summary in the workplace from Feb. 1, 2020, through April 30, 2020.
- Complete DCBS Form 801, for each recordable injury or illness entered on the OSHA 300 Log and keep it for five years.

You will find a list of low-hazard industries in [437-001-0700, Recording Workplace Injuries and Illnesses](#) (Table 1 – Exempt Industries).

Oregon OSHA's publication [OSHA forms for recording work-related injuries and illnesses](#) describes when an injury or illness is work-related and which work-related injuries and illnesses are recordable. It also includes a copy of the OSHA 300 Log and the OSHA 300A Summary and has instructions on how to complete them.

Oregon OSHA's [Recording and posting workplace injuries and illnesses fact sheet](#) also covers the requirements for recording work-related injuries and illnesses. ●



## Short take

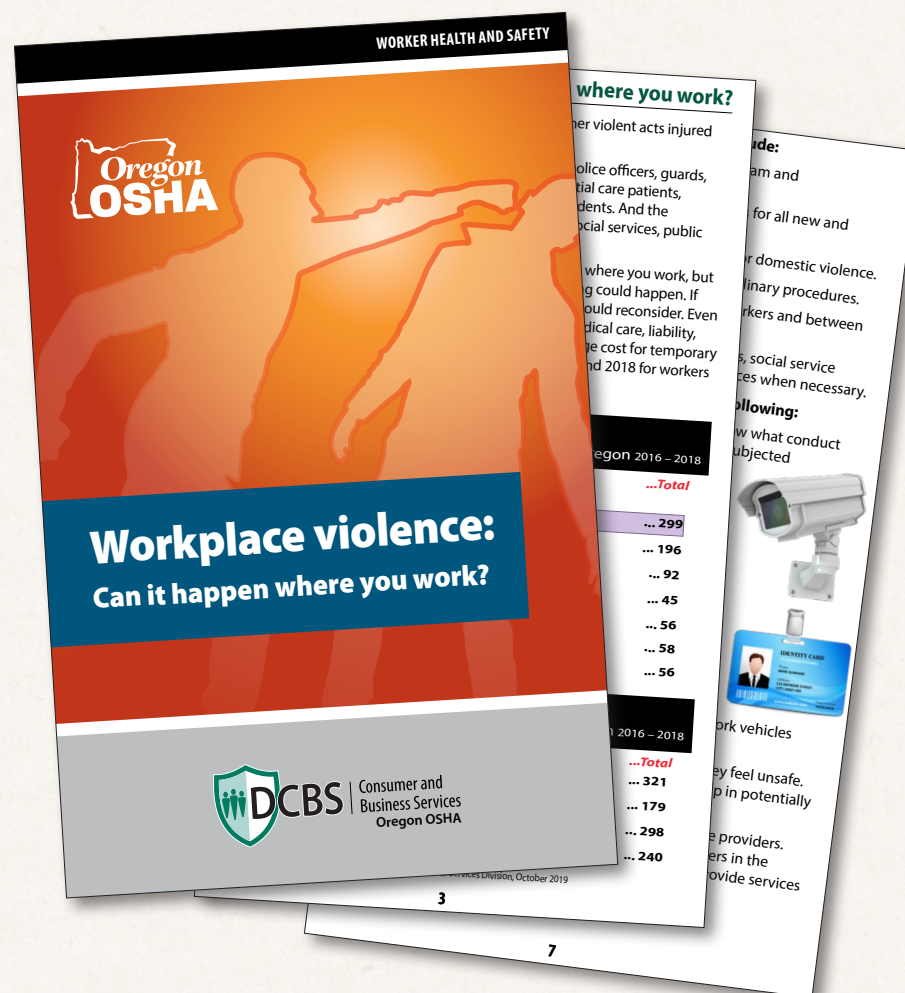
### Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work?

Nearly 20 years ago, Oregon OSHA published its first guide on preventing workplace violence. At the time, workplace violence – including threats of violence – was an emerging issue for most employers that often went unreported.

Since then, Oregon workers' compensation claims resulting from violent acts increased nearly every year. In 2018 (the most recent year for which data are available), there were 936 such claims. Victims tended to be nurses and nursing aides, police officers, guards, and teachers. Workplaces included state hospitals, private health care and social services, public schools, and correctional facilities.

Recently, Oregon OSHA published its fifth edition of the guide: Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work? The new guide continues the theme of the first guide, emphasizing the importance of an effective violence prevention program. But the new guide also includes information on topics covering employer and employee responsibilities for reducing violence risks and the importance of training, pre-employment screening, and security preparations.

The new guide is available in [print](#), [online](#), and at Oregon OSHA field offices. ●





## Short take

### Four job safety, health training grants awarded

Oregon OSHA has awarded four grants totaling more than \$150,000 to help develop workplace safety and health education and training programs. They include programs to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke, raise awareness of mental health issues, and to prevent musculoskeletal injuries.

Learn more about [grant applications](#), which re-open in July 2020.

The 2019 recipients are:

#### **Northwest Forest Worker Center: *Smoke Safety for Forest Workers***

The nonprofit group will produce a training program to help Latino forest workers in Jackson and Josephine counties eliminate or reduce their exposure to smoke from wildland fires.

Although there is little research on the effects of workplace exposure to wildfire smoke, the available evidence suggests forest and other outdoor workers face a higher risk of developing short- and long-term health problems related to wildfire smoke exposure.

The training provided by the Northwest Forest Worker Center will engage workers in interactive exercises. The nonprofit will measure progress in several ways, including debriefing trainers and interviewing workers several months after they receive the training.

***Grant award: \$40,000***



#### **University of Oregon: *Safety Voice for Ergonomics Masonry Craft Expansion***

The university will expand an existing training program – Safety Voice for Ergonomics (SAVE) – to help masonry craft workers prevent musculoskeletal injuries.

The rates of such injuries are high among construction workers, including masons. The rates are disproportionately high among younger workers, such as apprentices. These injuries can disable workers and cause them to leave their trade prematurely.

The university will expand SAVE materials, which now focus on brick and block apprentices, to include workers in the tile/terrazzo/marble and restoration fields. The training materials include interactive activities, discussions, and quizzes. Safety communication training also will be provided to help workers speak up when they see hazards and to resolve conflicts as they arise.

***Grant award: \$40,000***



### **UA Local 290 Apprentice Labor Management Cooperative Committee: Apprentice Peer Support Program**

This project will train and empower a group of apprentice peer support leaders to recognize and respond to mental health distress and suicidal behaviors among their peers and colleagues. The goals are to raise awareness of mental health and to prevent suicides.

The project is in response to the fact that suicide rates in the U.S. are rising. In fact, males in the construction and extraction industries are at heightened risk of suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The peer support leaders will be trained to know how to talk about mental health and suicide, and how to connect fellow apprentices to resources when they need help.

**Grant award: \$39,510.20**

### **SafeBuild Alliance: Enhancing Construction Safety for the Latino Population**

SafeBuild Alliance will work with LatinoBuilt, a trade association for Latino contractors in Oregon, to improve safety training for Spanish-speaking workers.

Injuries have decreased for English-speaking workers in construction, but have not done so for Spanish-speaking workers. Meanwhile, the number of Spanish-speaking workers in Oregon's construction industry is on the rise.

To address this problem, SafeBuild Alliance will seek to achieve two primary goals: increase the ability of construction companies and labor organizations to provide safety training for workers whose first language is Spanish and provide training in Spanish for Spanish-speaking workers.

**Grant award: \$39,000 ●**





## Short take

### Oregon employers, workers invited to take 'Safety Break' May 13

Employers and workers across the state are invited to take part in Safety Break for Oregon, a time to pause and reflect on the importance of protecting people from hazards and harm while on the job.

Will you take the Wednesday, May 13, stand-down as an opportunity to refresh your knowledge and training? Will you gather your team for a clear-eyed examination of potential new hazards and how to tackle them? Or will you celebrate past successes and recognize emerging safety leaders?

#### The choice of activity is yours.

Oregon OSHA encourages employers and workers to team up to celebrate on-the-job health and safety during the 17th annual Safety Break. When managers and employees work together to recognize and address safety and health concerns, the results include fewer injuries and reduced workers' compensation costs.

"This stand-down provides an opportunity for employers and workers to remember the high value they should place on preventing injury and illness in the workplace," said Michael Wood, administrator of Oregon OSHA. "At its best, it is not merely symbolic, but also an opportunity for a focused discussion about the best ways to make safety a reality in the workplace by identifying and eliminating hazards."

Companies that participate will be entered to win one of three \$100 checks, to be used for a luncheon of their choice, when they [sign up online](#) by Friday, May 8. The prizes will go to participating companies as part of a random drawing. The [Oregon SHARP Alliance](#) is sponsoring the contest. The nonprofit group promotes safety and health management by encouraging teamwork and cooperation among people, employers, and organizations to improve workplace health and safety for Oregon workers.

During Safety Break, companies are encouraged to share their activities on social media by tagging **@OregonOSHA** on Facebook and using **#SafetyBreak** on Twitter.

For more information, ideas on how to host an event, or to download graphics, visit the [Safety Break for Oregon website](#). ●







# Incident Alert! .....

**Employer** ....Reforestation contractor

**Incident** .....Chainsaw kickback

**Worker** .....Sawyer, male, age 21

**Issue** .....A foreman did not take an injured worker to the nearest medical facility as required by the employer's safety plan.

## What happened?

A 21-year-old sawyer was cutting brush with a chain-saw when the saw kicked back, cut his forehead, and fractured his skull. His foreman drove him more than two hours to a medical clinic, though a closer clinic was listed on the company's medical plan.

## How did it happen?

The sawyer was working with a crew of seven other sawyers, cutting brush at a forested site in Douglas County.

All the sawyers had been properly trained. They were wearing appropriate PPE, and their equipment was working properly. Their employer also had a documented safety plan. Although rudimentary, it covered safety meetings topics, potential site hazards, emergency procedures, land directions, communication options, medical facility locations, and supervisory duties. The safety plan also stated that employees injured at work would be transported to the nearest medical clinic.

The sawyer was slightly bent over and reaching into the brush with his 20-inch-bar, 461 Stihl chain saw, to cut branches and stems. The saw caught a stem or section of the brush at the tip of the bar, causing it to kick back toward him. He lost his grip and the tip of the bar flipped up the protective face screen on his hardhat and struck his forehead.

After the supervisor assessed his injury, the sawyer put pressure on his laceration and walked a short distance uphill toward the crew's vehicle.

The supervisor told the crew to stop work for the day and load their equipment, then drove the sawyer and the rest of the crew to an immediate care clinic that was 77 miles away. It was a long drive, but the supervisor knew that the Spanish-speaking crew were comfortable with the clinic personnel, who also spoke Spanish.

## Violation

437-007-0220(1): The employer did not implement an emergency medical plan to ensure emergency medical service to employees with major illnesses and injuries. ●



The hard hat worn by the victim at the time of the incident. Note the damage from the chain saw on the upper right of the screened face shield.



The 461 Stihl chain saw.

# Going the Distance .....

## Company:

Timber Products Company – Spectrum Division

## Sales manager:

Patrick Cowan

## Quality and safety manager:

Adam Wasniewski

## Operations/facilities/workforce:

Located in White City, Timber Products Company's Spectrum Division, which employs 43 people, is an industry leader in developing and manufacturing value-added specialty products. Those products include: SpectraBoard, used for such applications as the interiors of cabinets; thermally-fused melamine panels that are created by using heat and pressure to liquefy and fuse melamine resin into particle board, which makes it more water-resistant, scratch-proof, and easy to clean; and decorative roll laminate. The Spectrum Division is an [Oregon OSHA Voluntary Protection Program \(VPP\) Star Site](#), which speaks to its long-running commitment to worker safety. It has been a VPP employer since April 2003.



Patrick Cowan

Adam Wasniewski

"You don't have to become a VPP or SHARP site to accomplish a good safety program," according to Adam Wasniewski, quality and safety manager for the Spectrum Division of Timber Products Company. "Just simply do what's right, do what's safe."



## Responsibilities/hazards addressed

**Cowan:** Our focus is on identifying risks before we have an injury. We make sure all of our employees look out for their co-workers and everyone works and acts in a safe manner. Investing capital in the plant to help address safety concerns is supported by upper management and ownership.

**Wasniewski:** My responsibilities are simple. I want every employee to return home in the same condition that they arrived in. It's not about the bottom line or saving the company money. It's about having people return home to their families. It's about being able to listen to your kids' stories, because you haven't suffered hearing loss. It's about going on hikes, playing catch, relaxing; it's about keeping people safe and injury-free so they can enjoy their life to the fullest.

**Question:** The Spectrum Division has long demonstrated its commitment to continuous workplace safety improvement, including graduating from Oregon OSHA's [Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program \(SHARP\)](#) and becoming a VPP Star Site. These are not easy accomplishments. What drove you to commit to these programs?

**Cowan:** Our plant had a serious injury occur prior to our commitment, and employees and management made the decision that we didn't want to relive that issue. Our safety program is part of our culture, and it drives everything we do, including our hiring practices.



Timber Products Company's Spectrum Division is an industry leader in developing and manufacturing value-added specialty products.

**Wasniewski:** I started my career as a machine operator here at Timber Products Spectrum. I know how important safety is to each and every person, no matter what level they are working at. Knowing firsthand how important safety is to each and every employee is what keeps me motivated to accomplish these tasks.

**Question:** By the time this article is published, the company will be engaged in the VPP recertification process. How important is this process to Spectrum Division?

**Wasniewski:** It has become part of who we are. It's our culture here at Spectrum. We hold ourselves to a higher standard, and that standard makes each

and every person better. You can feel the pride as you walk through our mill, and that pride is part of what makes our customers choose us instead of other competitors.

**Cowan:** It gives our employees recognition for the efforts they put forward on a continuous basis. Our VPP program is also the foundation for our Quality Assurance Program and many of our production efficiency initiatives.

**Question:** What can you tell us about some of the key safety improvements you've made over the years and how they've made the business of your company better overall – not just on the safety side of things?

**Cowan:** It's not necessarily a particular improvement we made. It's really about the fact that the foundation of the safety program transcends all aspects of our business. It gives us the foundation for all other programs in the plant. Our Quality Assurance program is closely formatted to match our safety programs. It gives us a structure by which we generate early acceptance by hourly employees, and our initiatives are usually quite successful.

**Wasniewski:** The best safety improvement any company can do, in my opinion, is to create the best safety culture possible. We've done this at Timber Products Spectrum over the years, but it is no easy task. It takes a while to gain the trust and show how a good safety culture is a benefit to everyone. Once you accomplish this, though, the benefits are unbelievable. Besides the obvious – fewer injuries, fewer claims, and fewer expenses – the overall morale of the company is substantially better. You'll start to see more and more people with a smile on their face, you'll start to see the mill become cleaner, and the product quality will improve. The list is endless, and all beneficial.



**Question:** Not every employer can be a VPP site, but VPP employers may have best practices or advice or stories to share with other employers who want to step up their game when it comes to on-the-job safety and health. What words of wisdom do you have for others?

**Wasniewski:** Do what's right. Those are the only words of wisdom you'll need. You don't have to become a VPP or SHARP site to accomplish a good safety program. Just simply do what's right, do what's safe. You can constantly get bogged down with details when it comes to safety. Just keep doing the little things; investigate near misses, listen to concerns, address the hazards. Build the culture you want. A good safety program will just fall into place.

**Cowan:** We have learned so much about safety from other employers, customers, and competitors. We attend our regional American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSE) meeting for formal instruction and networking. These opportunities allow us to build relationships with people who may have an interest in sharing information or challenges that can be easily addressed in the local network. We always look to share our experiences and learn more from others. It seems like when you think you know it all, life reaches out to prove that you don't. ●

*Timber Products Company's Spectrum Division is an Oregon OSHA Voluntary Protection Program Star Site, which speaks to its commitment to worker safety.*