



Workplace Safety

10 'OSHA Top 10' Questions for a Safety Expert

Julie Sullivan | Oct 12, 2017

What You Need to Know:

OSHA recently released its preliminary annual “Top 10” list of most frequently cited workplace violations, and general requirements for fall protection is at the top.

According to the MSC safety expert we interviewed, some of the biggest requests from businesses in terms of fall protection involve adequate training programs.

Although specific actions to combat workplace safety violations are certainly required, businesses need to focus on being flexible in regard to change, creating a culture of safety and being proactive (as opposed to reactive).

The top OSHA violations are nothing to brag about. We talked to Sara Hestand, a safety specialist at MSC, who lives and breathes the issues companies face every day. Find out the common patterns she sees all the time—and how she advises to fix them.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has released its preliminary annual “Top 10” *list* of most frequently cited workplace safety violations, and general requirements for fall protection sits at the top for a second year in a row. Similarly, training requirements for fall protection is also on the list—the only new addition for top-cited workplace hazards in 2017.

The list, presented at the *2017 NSC Congress & Expo*, is a compilation of nearly 32,000 inspections of workplaces by OSHA staff, according to the *U.S. Department of Labor*. These types of violations result in more than 4,500 worker deaths and roughly 3 million injuries, per data tracked by the DOL.

Here is a snapshot of the list, as reported by the *National Safety Council*:

1. Fall Protection; General Requirements (1926.501) – **6,072**
2. Hazard Communication (1910.1200) – **4,176**
3. Scaffolding (1926.451) – **3,288**
4. Respiratory Protection (1910.134) – **3,097**
5. Lockout/Tagout (1910.147) – **2,877**
6. Ladders (1926.1053) – **2,241**
7. Powered Industrial Trucks (1910.178) – **2,162**
8. Machine Guarding (1910.212) – **1,933**

9. Fall Protection – Training Requirements (1926.503) – **1,523**
10. Electrical – Wiring Methods (1910.305) – **1,405**

Of course, simply surveying the list alone isn't enough to ensure your workplace is adequately prepared to meet (and eventually eliminate) workplace hazards. We sit down with Sara Hestand, a safety specialist at MSC servicing the Chicagoland, Northwest Indiana and Central Illinois regions, to further elaborate on the OSHA "Top 10" announcement and what the list means for your business. Hestand has been with MSC for eight years, and her credentials include a CSP Master, Six Sigma Green Belt and an MBA.

1. The preliminary OSHA "Top 10" list of workplace violations for 2017 just came out, and fall protection violations are once again leading the pack. What are some of the most common requests and issues you see companies you help facing when it comes to fall protection and fall protection training?

The most frequent requests that I see around fall protection involve *training*. Customers are looking for basic user training on-site, which can be offered in a wide variety of formats. Recently, I have had many customers reach out regarding training on inspection for fall protection equipment and regarding inspections and certifications of harnesses. There are multiple types of training available and more customers are looking to participate in them, including training on inspection and competent person training.

2. What are some of the most common requests and issues you see with companies you help when it comes to hazard communications?

I see a lot of requests from customers looking for an overall review of their hazard communications. They are also looking for assistance to make sure that everything has the appropriate signage, and that the signage communicates effectively and will last a long time. I have had several customers looking for exit and egress signs. They want to be sure that they have exits and pathways clearly marked. Customers have also been showing particular interest in photoluminescent signs, which require less maintenance.

3. What are some of the most common requests and issues you see with lockout/tagout?

With lockout/tagout, individuals are looking for a review of best practices. Many businesses have a program in place and are looking for resources to continue to highlight the importance of lockout/tagout programs. This could be signs, new tags, new stations or refresher sessions. Reviewing best practices keeps the program active and helps users remember how important it is to follow procedures.

Check out our *comprehensive list* of ways to prevent safety hazards with an effective lockout/tagout program.

MSC Safety Specialist Bio

Name: Sara Hestand

Background: Industrial Markets

Certifications: CSP Master, MBA, Six Sigma Green Belt, QSSP

Tenure at MSC: 8 years

Region: Chicago, Northwest Indiana and Central Illinois

Learn more how MSC Safety Specialists can help your business.

4. What are some of the biggest challenges for companies trying to protect hands and heads on the job?

The biggest challenges that I see relating to head and hand injuries involve getting people to consistently wear the appropriate PPE. Often businesses have been using the same type of PPE for years and it can be difficult to convince individuals that change can be good. In relation to head protection, many don't realize that hard hats and their suspensions need to be replaced regularly. With hand protection, new ANSI cut levels have resulted in more companies revisiting their cut protection. I am seeing more organizations move away from general purpose gloves and begin using cut gloves. Many individuals feel that wearing any PPE is enough. Often, they miss that having the right PPE for the application is key to staying safe on the job.

5. Have you experienced an uptick in questions around silica lately? And on a related note, what are some of the most common requests and issues you see with respirators?

I am having more conversations about silica. The most common requests with respirators are again wrapped around training and fit testing tools. Train the trainer programs for fit testing are becoming more popular. We assist the customer in acquiring fit testing equipment for their site and use our resources to train them to provide fit testing for their employees on-site. I also find that it is critical to remind users that proper maintenance and cleaning of respirators is very important.

6. What are some of the most common requests and issues you see with machine guarding?

Customers are looking for recommendations for machine guarding—particularly custom guarding for older machines. Often, they are reaching out for a machine guarding assessment, where an engineer would come on-site to design custom solutions for them. I have also seen an increase in requests for protection and barriers around robotic cells on-site.

Find out more about *machine guarding* and workplace safety.

“The most concerning safety issue that I see is when companies or employees are not willing to change. Just because there hasn't been an injury does not mean that it will not happen. Taking a reactive approach to safety is scary to me.”

Sara Hestand
Safety Specialist, MSC

7. Is there an area of safety that comes up more than anything else?

I see the most activity around fall protection (including ladder safety), hand and arm protection and signage. These are all areas where we can offer surveys and plant walk-throughs to identify areas of improvement. These are also three areas where we offer sessions covering best practices and can often provide strong cost savings and productivity improvements for our partners. It is important for our customers to see the data to back up what we have done. Often our recommendations require a product with a higher piece price but offer a much greater value and longer life.

8. If you were to advise companies at high level where they can improve their safety programs overall, where would it be and why?

I would advise them to start talking about safety more. Build the level of comfort with employees so that if they see an issue, they feel comfortable bringing it to the attention of the appropriate people. Encourage employees to come up with programs or contests to increase safe practices. I have seen companies that had their associates create safety posters that were hung throughout the plant. This brought safety to a very personal level at these sites.

9. What do you think is the most valuable and useful training in safety for new safety managers? And for those whose main responsibility is not safety but who have been tasked with being a designated company resource?

Having a basic understanding of safety and knowing where to look for specific answers is important. For fall protection, if a business does not have a trained, competent person on-site, that could be dangerous. There are many resources available that will come on-site or offer free training regionally. By joining professional associations, they can attend presentations, receive updates and take advantage of training opportunities.

Check out our list of *best practices* in terms of training and retraining associates.

10. What is the "scariest" safety issue you see with regularity?

The most concerning safety issue that I see is when companies or employees are not willing to change. Just because there hasn't been an injury does not mean that it will not happen. Taking a reactive approach to safety is scary to me. Why not be proactive? Why not look at potential issues and near misses and fix the problem? Again, it may appear to be more expensive to implement new solutions, but the cost of an injury is much higher. Our goal is to work with our partners to find the best solution to keep them productive and safe. We want everyone to go home from their jobs, to their family, friends, loved ones and pets, just as they arrived.

How many items on the list affect your business? What actions are you taking to keep your employees safe? Let us know in the comment section.