

# UTAH OSHA SAFETY LINE

NEWSLETTER



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## Utah Labor Commission Workplace Safety Grant

The Utah Labor Commission is requesting applications to award funding for projects or initiatives demonstrating a commitment to workplace safety. The purpose of the grant is to identify businesses, educational institutions and community agencies who demonstrate a commitment to workplace safety, and desire to implement initiatives which promote either new, or existing safety programs within the workplace. Proposals may include, but are not limited to, development of workshops and training, implementation of specialized safety programs, increasing effort and resources for existing programs, and collaborative workplace safety training between organizations.

The money that supports the workplace safety fund is generated from a 0.25% assessment of workers' compensation premiums paid annually in Utah. The Utah Labor Commission is charged with the task of using these funds to promote workplace safety, which in-

cludes awarding a portion of account funds to selected grant applicants. This upcoming fiscal year will include over \$300,000 in total awards to selected grant recipients and will be distributed among as many qualifying applicants and in monetary amounts the Labor Commission deems appropriate. Entities eligible to apply for a grant include Utah businesses, community-based organizations, Utah non-profits and local associations and educational institutions.

"The Workplace Safety Committee of the Labor Commission has identified key priorities upon which to focus for the upcoming year. The focus is with industries and occupations that have higher incidences of workplace accidents and fatalities such as construction, manufacturing and highway safety, as well as projects that assist Utah employers in breaking down barriers to safer work environments due to language and cultural barriers", said Utah Labor Commissioner, Sherrie Hayashi. "This is a great opportunity for an employer or other entity to augment its safety program budget and provide additional means to reduce workplace accidents for its employees."

The Grant Application and all related details outlining the criteria successful applicants must satisfy, as well as the process the Commission shall use to award the funds, is available online at [www.laborcommission.utah.gov](http://www.laborcommission.utah.gov) or by contacting Elena Bensor, Community Relations/Public Information Officer at (801) 530-6918 or [elenabensor@utah.gov](mailto:elenabensor@utah.gov).

Grant Applications are due Monday, March 18th, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. The grant contract will involve up to a 12 month period ending June 30, 2014.

### In This Issue

Workplace Safety Grant

Influenza Information

Compliance Corner

New Emphasis Initiatives

# National Flu Situation Page



Has your business been effected by the Influenza Virus this year? Each year the influenza virus causes companies to struggle to maintain their productivity. According to the Center for Disease Control the flu is widespread throughout the United States. Twenty-six states are reporting moderate levels of Influenza-like symptoms, including the State of Utah. The proportion of people seeing their health care provider seems to be leveling off, but the number of cases remains elevated.

Since October 1, 2012, 6,191 laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations have been reported. This translates to a rate of 22.2 influenza-associated hospitalizations per 100,000 people in the United States. The highest proportion of deaths is for those who are 65 and older. During the week of January 13-19, 2013, eight pediatric deaths associated with influenza were recorded, which brings the total of pediatric deaths for 2012-2013 flu season to 37.

The CDC maintains a web site which provides information on the National Flu Situation. Please go to: <http://www.vuetoo.com/vue1/SituationPageNews.asp?sit=8188&ref=anm> for updated information on the flu this season.

## Compliance Corner

**Question:** Is an employer required to pay for back support belts?

**Answer:** The OSHA Personal Protective Equipment Standard does not require an employer to provide back support belts for their employees.

Because of the dramatic increase of workers who rely on back belts to prevent injury during lifts, NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) conducted a study, in October 1996, on the effectiveness of back belts. NIOSH was receiving many inquiries regarding what back support belt was best for each particular industry. NIOSH decided to do a study, not on which belt would best protect workers, it conducted a study on the effectiveness of a back support belt and their effect on reducing workplace injuries. After a review of scientific literature, NIOSH concluded that, because of the limitations of the studies that have analyzed workplace use of back belts, the results cannot be used to either support or refute the effectiveness of back belts in injury reduction. Because there were few studies on the association between workplace use of back belts and injuries, NIOSH also reviewed studies of the relationship between back belt use and forces exerted on the spine during manual lifting. Once again, there is currently no scientific evidence that these belts do reduce injuries in healthy workers. NIOSH believes that the decision to use back belts should be a voluntary decision by both employers and employees. NIOSH also believes that workers may have a false sense of security when wearing a back belt, and therefore may try to lift more weight than they would if they were not wearing a belt. Subsequent studies have found that back support braces do not make a difference in the prevention of back injuries.

**Note:** Because the Institute's primary focus is on the prevention of injury, NIOSH did not address the use of back belts as medical treatment during rehabilitation from injury.



## Utah OSHA Announces Two New Emphasis Initiatives

**The Trenching and Excavating Emphasis Initiative** will concentrate on those workplaces that require employees to enter and work within trenches and excavations. Employees who work in trenches and excavations with inadequate and/or no cave-in protection face increased risk of exposure to serious physical injuries and/or death. Employees also face other hazards that could be associated with working in trenches and excavations, such as water accumulation and loose material(s) falling in and onto them. Confinement itself while working in trenches may pose entrapment hazards and work in trenches may keep employees closer to hazards than they would be otherwise, such as working in close proximity of operating mechanical excavating equipment, as well as hazards of worksites that require employees to work in and/or around traffic.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Reported for 2011 a total of 84 deaths due to workers being “Struck, caught, or crushed in collapsing structure, equipment, or material...” with 44 being classified “Excavation or trenching cave-in...”

**The Confined Spaces Emphasis Initiative** will concentrate on those workplaces that contain spaces considered “Confined”, due to their limited or restricted means for entry or exit and not designed for continuous employee occupancy; such as underground vaults, tanks, storage bins, manholes, pits, silos, process vessels, storm drains, and pipelines/sewers. Confined spaces also have the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere; contain a material that has the potential to engulf an entrant; has walls that converge inward or floors that slope downward and taper into a smaller area which could trap or asphyxiate an entrant. They also potentially contain other recognized safety or health hazard, such as unguarded machinery, exposed live wires, or may cause heat stress.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported for 2011 a total of 23 deaths due to “inhalation in enclosed, restricted, or confined space...”

With these two emphasis initiatives Utah OSHA is taking proactive steps to decrease, and ultimately eliminate, accidents resulting from work around these hazards. Commencing in January 2013, our personnel will stop at sites where trenching or excavation work is being performed, and where utility or telecommunications confined space entry is taking place. At these sites a comprehensive inspection will be conducted to ensure safe procedures and practices are in use, and to enforce safety procedures according to 29 CFR 1926 Standards and the Utah Administrative Code.

The division is committed to the safety and health of Utah’s workers. For more information, visit the Utah OSHA website at [www.uosh.utah.gov](http://www.uosh.utah.gov) or contact our office at 801.530.6901