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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

JAN 31 1973

B-163375

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The General Accounting Office is reviewing the occupational safety and health activities of Federal civilian agencies under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 and Executive Order 11612, dated July 26, 1971. The review is being conducted pursuant to a request by the Chairman, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate. A summary report to the Committee will be prepared when our work is completed.

The act requires the head of each Federal agency to establish and maintain an effective and comprehensive occupational safety and health program consistent with the standards promulgated under the act by the Secretary of Labor. As part of the program, each agency is required to provide safe and healthful workplaces for its Federal employees.

Executive Order 11612 sets forth the criteria Federal agencies must follow in establishing a safety and health program. The criteria include a requirement for periodic inspections of workplaces to insure compliance with the standards. The Secretary of Labor sent copies of the act, Executive Order 11612, and the occupational safety and health standards which were published in the Federal Register on May 29, 1971, to heads of Federal departments and agencies on August 24, 1971.

To determine the extent of Federal agencies' compliance with the applicable standards, we employed an experienced safety engineer from private industry and acquired the services of an industrial hygienist from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Department of Labor, to inspect workplaces in Washington, D.C., at selected Federal agencies. These individuals are recognized experts in their respective fields.

Among the workplaces inspected were those of the Department of Commerce at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW. The Department's workplaces were selected because they included industrial operations, such as printing, and general office areas. These facilities were inspected on August 25, 1972. A representative from the Department's safety council accompanied our representatives. Except that the inspections were limited to selected areas and activities, the inspections were conducted in a manner similar to an OSHA inspection in private business workplaces.

Observations noted during our inspection are presented in the enclosure to this report. We found many instances of noncompliance with OSHA standards, relating to mechanical, electrical, fire, housekeeping,

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and other hazards in the workplace. Some of the instances of noncompliance were severe enough that, had they been found in private businesses, the businesses would have been subject to monetary penalties. Other instances of noncompliance noted were less severe.

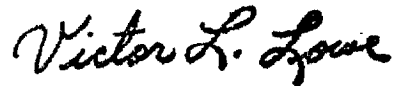
Our observations, noted in the enclosure, were discussed informally with Department safety officials during a meeting on August 30, 1972. It was generally agreed that corrective action was needed. This report is to provide you with our findings formally and in sufficient detail to insure that appropriate corrective action has been or will be taken to comply with the intent of the act and Executive order.

Copies of this report are being sent today to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the Secretary of Labor.

Because of congressional interest in federally sponsored occupational safety and health programs, we are also providing copies to the Chairman, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare; the Chairman, Select Subcommittee on Labor, House Committee on Education and Labor; the Chairman, Subcommittee on Environmental Problems Affecting Small Business, House Select Small Business Committee; and Representative William A. Steiger.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation given our representatives during the review and inspection. We would appreciate being informed of any further actions taken on matters discussed in this report.

Sincerely yours,



Victor L. Lowe
Director

Enclosure

The Honorable
The Secretary of Commerce

OBSERVATIONS RELATING TO COMPLIANCE WITH
 OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH STANDARDS
 NOTED DURING INSPECTIONS ON AUGUST 25, 1972, AT
 WORKPLACES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
 AT 14th STREET AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NW.

Safety engineer observations

OSHA standard
 (note a)

OFFICE OF PUBLICATION:

General observations:

It appeared that fire extinguishers throughout the entire establishment were not being periodically inspected. 1910.157(d)
 Extinguishers in many areas were not properly marked or accessible, especially in the hallways. 1910.157(a)

Platemaking department:

A handpowered papercutter did not have a guard for its blade. 1910.212(a)(3)(ii)
 There were no eyewash facilities for immediate attention in the event of a splash from handling or mixing acids. 1910.94(d)(9)(vii)
 Access to fire extinguishers was blocked. 1910.157(a)(2)

Bindery department:

The locations of fire extinguishers were not properly marked. 1910.157(a)(3)
 Fire extinguishers were mounted above heights permitted. 1910.157(a)(6)
 A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards. 1910.212(a)(5)
 A portable air compressor did not have a proper guard on its drivebelt. 1910.219(e)(1)(i)
 Compressed air used for cleaning purposes exceeded 30 pounds per square inch. 1910.242(b)
 The collator was not equipped with guards at various points of operation. 1910.219
 The stitcher machines did not have face shields to prevent injury in case of wire breakage. 1910.132(a)
 A papercutter was not properly guarded to prevent injury to the operator. 1910.212(a)(3)(ii)
 A number of electrical receptacles did not have faceplates. 1910.315(n)(4)

Safety engineer observationsOSHA standard
(note a)

Mailing department:

An addressograph machine was not properly grounded to prevent electrical shock.

1910.314(a)(1)

Cutting department:

A papercutter was not working properly thus exposing employees operating the machine to injury.

1910.212(a)(3)(ii)

A portable air compressor did not have a guard on its drivebelt.

1910.219(e)(1)(i)

The fire sprinklers may not operate properly because heads were painted.

1910.159(d)

Air pressure produced by the portable compressor exceeded 30 pounds per square inch.

1910.242(b)

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION:

Computer room:

The number of fire extinguishers was inadequate.

1910.157

Access to some fire extinguishers was blocked.

1910.157(a)(2)

A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.

1910.212(a)(5)

Exit signs were not readily visible.

1910.37

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION:

Press room:

A number of electrical receptacles were broken or did not have faceplates.

1910.315(n)(4)

The area used for charging the batteries for the forklift trucks was not properly safeguarded to prevent injury to employees.

1910.178(g)

Ignition keys were left in an unattended forklift truck.

1910.178(m)(5)

A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.

1910.212(a)(5)

Solvent storage room:

A potential for explosion existed.
Storage drums containing solvents were

1910.106(e)

Safety engineer observationsOSHA standard
(note a)

not properly labeled, were exposed to uncovered electrical wires, and were not grounded and there was no ventilation. (The motor had been removed from the ventilating fan.)

Camera department:

Fire exits were obstructed.	1910.37(k)
There were no eyewash facilities for immediate attention in the event of a splash from handling or mixing caustics or acids.	1910.94(d)(9)(vii)
A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.	1910.212(a)(5)
Fluorescent light fixtures did not have guards for the tubes.	1910.324(i)(1)(ii)

Photo section:

A portable air compressor did not have a proper guard on its drivebelt.	1910.219(e)(1)(i)
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Bindery:

The fluorescent light fixture located above the collator did not have guards for the tubes.	1910.324(i)(1)(ii)
A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.	1910.212(a)(5)
The stitcher machine did not have a face shield to prevent injury in case of wire breakage.	1910.132(a)

PATENT OFFICE:

Reproduction room:

A number of machines did not have guards at the point of operation.	1910.219
There was evidence of smoking where flammable vapors existed.	1910.106(e)(6)(i)
Ventilation was inadequate.	1910.106(e)(3)(v)
There were uncovered containers of flammable solvents.	1910.106(e)(2)(iv)
The carbon dioxide extinguishing system in the solvent storage cabinet appeared to have been discharged and appeared inoperable.	1910.161(b)(2)(i)

Safety engineer observationsOSHA standard
(note a)

Excess waste material and rubbish were piled in corners and under stairways.

1910.106(e)(9)(iii)

Paper files stack area:

The floors were littered with papers, and documents stored in bookcase-type storage racks were protruding to the extent that some came in contact with electrical lighting fixtures.

1910.141(a)(1)(i)

MAINTENANCE SHOPS:

Pipe shop:

Compressed gas bottles in this area were not properly secured to prevent them from falling and injuring employees or discharging the contents.

1910.252(a)(2)(ii)

Fire extinguishers were placed on floors or tables instead of being mounted at appropriate heights and in the manner required.

1910.157(a)

Compressed air used for cleaning purposes exceeded 30 pounds per square inch.

1910.242(b)

Compressor room:

A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.

1910.212(a)(5)

A vertical steel ladder in this room extended beyond 20 feet without a protective cage to prevent employees from falling.

1910.27(d)(ii)

One of the condenser water pumps had a projecting lock key on its coupling, thus exposing employees to a tripping hazard. The mezzanine level did not have a toe-board to prevent tools from dropping and possibly injuring employees.

1910.219(h)

1910.23(c)

Paper baler area:

A number of cooling fans did not have proper blade guards.

1910.212(a)(5)

A number of electrical receptacles did not have faceplates.

1910.315(n)(4)

OSHA standard
(note a)

Safety engineer observations

OFFICE OF PUBLICATION:

Press room:

There was an apparent noise problem which may be exposing the 40 to 50 employees who operate printing machinery to sound levels greater than those permissible.

1910.95

Binder area:

A noise problem may exist around the machines used for folding documents.

1910.95

Photographic dark rooms:

Acetic acid levels in both rooms-- 5 parts per million--were above acceptable levels. Levels would probably be higher on days or at times when fresh solutions were prepared.

1910.93

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION:

Solvent room:

Concentration of mixed organic vapors in this room exceeded the permissible level for extended exposure.

1910.93(d) and (e)

NORTH GARAGE:

Loading dock:

Engine exhaust fumes from this area penetrated to other areas including occupied offices and hallways.

1910.93

^aStandards cited refer to title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1910--Occupational Safety and Health Standards.