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OSHA holds forum focusing on women's safety and health

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On August 9, 2012, OSHA Administrator Dr. David Michaels, along with Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis participated in a forum in Las Vegas, Nevada entitled "Working for Women: Your Job, Your Rights." A focus of the program was the challenges facing female workers in today's workplaces.

Michaels discussed, among other things, what OSHA is doing to protect women's rights on the job. Another focus of the forum was what the Labor Department was doing to address unemployment for women.

According to OSHA's "Quick Takes" newsletter, "[i]n particular, Dr. Michaels discussed OSHA's work to protect women workers throughout the nation—highlighting the agency's robust efforts in hair and nail salons, healthcare, outdoor labor, and construction."

For instance, in its fact sheet on hair solons, OSHA has noted that it has discovered some hair smoothing products contain formaldehyde and may release formaldehyde at levels above OSHA's permissible limits during use. OSHA also noted that such products may be mislabeled, thereby posing a health risk to salon workers.

Salons and other employers such as beauty schools using such products that contain or may release formaldehyde are required to follow the requirements in OSHA's formaldehyde and hazard communication standards.

The forum also focused on women in the healthcare industry. The serious safety and health hazards they face, according to OSHA's fact sheet, "include bloodborne pathogens and biological hazards,

potential chemical and drug exposures, waste anesthetic gas exposures, respiratory hazards, ergonomic hazards from lifting and repetitive tasks, laser hazards, workplace violence, hazards associated with laboratories, and radioactive material and x-ray hazards."

In addition, it was noted that some of the potential chemical exposures include formaldehyde which is used for preservation of specimens for pathology; as well as ethylene oxide, glutaraldehyde, and paracetic acid which is used for sterilization.

Since more women are entering the construction industry, the forum also touched on a number of hazards in that field.

It is well known that falls are the leading cause of death and injury in construction. OSHA points out in its fact sheet that "[f]alls can be prevented and lives can be saved through three simple steps:

• Plan • Provide • Train

The hazards of falls are from ladders, scaffolds, and roofs. OSHA has an extensive educational resources page on its website that gives employees and companies information about falls and how to prevent them.

OSHA also provides training tools for construction companies to utilize as well as posters to display at their worksites.

For more information on these subjects, see:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/hairsalons/index.html>

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/healthcarefacilities/index.html>

<http://www.osha.gov/stopfalls/index.html>

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