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Construction

OSHA Plans to Rescind Compliance Directive On Fall Protection Under Steel Erection Rule

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration intends to rescind a compliance directive on fall protection for its steel erection standard that some have argued weakens worker protection, Jordan Barab, acting assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health, said.

Barab made his comments at the meeting, July 28-31, of the Advisory Committee on Construction Safety and Health.

Barab said July 30 that OSHA would “get rid of the compliance directive in exchange for 100 percent fall protection.”

He also told the advisory committee that OSHA is rescinding the 1995 interim fall protection guidance for residential construction that many believed made conditions more dangerous for workers (39 OSHR 662, 8/6/09).

The advisory committee objected to the directive because it believed the directive was unsafe for iron workers, according to Migliaccio, who is the executive director of safety and health for the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers.

At issue is a compliance directive issued by OSHA in March 2002. The directive interpreted the 2001 federal steel erection rule for OSHA’s field officers (32 OSHR 277, 3/28/02).

In one area, the directive determined that temporary decking placed below workers is unnecessary if workers attach their safety harnesses.

Frank Migliaccio, a member of the advisory committee, said that “the decking, planking, or netting was to stop falling objects from going more than two floors and the decking and planking afforded a rescue platform for any one that may have fallen with the full body harness on.”

This would allow the use of a ladder to rescue the person, he said, rather than require a crane which may not have been in the area for such a rescue.

Shear Connectors. In another area, OSHA’s policy under the steel erection compliance directive is to issue de minimis violations when employers are found to have shear connectors installed onto beams during fabrication. The standard requires that these bolts or rods that attach to the top of steel beams be installed once they are in place in order to eliminate a tripping hazard in the fabrication process.

However, the steel studs may be factory installed if all workers, including connectors and deckers, use fall protection at all times, under the agency’s compliance directive. Supposedly, a worker who trips on one of these protections would be caught by their fall protection system.

However, workers are still exposed to the hazard of tripping, Migliaccio said. Iron workers could trip and hit and shear connector either on their head or trip backwards and hurt their tailbone, he said.

By PATRICIA WARE