

COVID-19, OSHA Standards and the Surfacing Industry

By Mary Malotke

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic through October 2020, OSHA inspections have resulted in OSHA citing the employers in 85 establishments for violations relating to the Coronavirus. These citations have resulted in proposed OSHA penalties of \$1,222,156.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to help assure these conditions are there to protect America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov.

The mission of the Department of Labor is to foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights. With regard to COVID-19, the focus on risk is typically on inhalation and exhalation of very small particles or droplets. When talking, sneezing, singing or similar actions, these droplets can carry the virus with them in the air.

This article is intended to help employers understand which OSHA regulations have been cited most frequently during COVID-19 related inspections. This data is based on instances where OSHA initiated inspections because of complaints or referrals, in medical and healthcare facilities, as well as construction and installation to remodel related locales, and warehousing for storage and distribution facilities.

By understanding which workplace hazards have most often resulted in OSHA citations, you can help ensure that you are better protecting your workers and minimizing the possibility of being cited. The common standards that OSHA has used so far this year to cite employers are

discussed below in the order of the frequency in which they are cited.

OSHA inspections have resulted in the agency citing employers for violations including failure to do the following:

- Implement a written respirator program,
- Provide a medical evaluation, a fit test and training on the proper use of the respirator,
- File reports with OSHA on injuries, illnesses and fatalities.

10 Steps Your Worksite Can Use To Reduce Risk Associated with COVID-19 Virus

1. Encourage workers to stay home if sick.
2. Encourage respiratory etiquette, including how to cover coughs and sneezes.
3. Provide a place to wash hands or alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
4. Limit worksite access to only essential workers, if possible.
5. Establish flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), if feasible.
6. Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks or tools.
7. Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces, equipment and other elements in the work area.
8. Use EPA-approved cleaning chemicals.
9. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use of all cleaning and disinfection products.
10. Encourage workers to report any safety and health concerns.

■ Record an injury or illness on OSHA record-keeping forms.

■ Comply with the General Duty Clause (5(a)) for cutting, grinding, polishing, lifting, installing, warehousing, other storage and manufacturing.

Detailed resources are also available on the agency's COVID-19 webpage (https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/additional_resources.html) to help employers comply with these standards.

The OSHA Standards Specifically Related to COVID-19:

- Provide a medical evaluation before a worker is fit-tested or uses a respirator.
- Perform an appropriate fit test for workers using tight fitting respirators.
- Employers must assess the workplace to determine if COVID-19 hazards are present, or likely to be present, which will require the use of a respirator and potentially other personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Establish, implement and update a written respiratory protection program with required worksite-specific procedures.
- Provide an appropriate respirator and/or other PPE to each employee when necessary to protect the health of the employees (ensuring the respirator and/or PPE used is the correct type and size).
- Train workers to safely use respirators and/or other PPE in the workplace, and retrain workers when changes in the workplace make previous training obsolete.
- Store respirators and other PPE properly in a way to protect them from damage, contamination and, where applicable, deformation of the face piece and exhalation valve.
- For any fatality that occurs within 30 days of a work-related incident, report the fatality to OSHA within eight hours of finding out about it.
- Keep required records of any work-related fatalities, injuries and illness.

In addition to airborne particulate generated when manufacturing and finishing surfaces (NAISCS # 327991), installation of the surfacing material can also be considered a construction job (NAISCS # 236220).

Training Construction Workers

Train construction crews on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and an explanation of how the disease is potentially spread, including the fact that infected people can spread the virus even if they do not have symptoms.

Employers should inform employees about appropriate social distancing and hygiene practices. This includes avoiding physical contact with others and maintaining a distance of at least 6 ft. from each other whenever possible, including areas inside work trailers or any other enclosed spaces.

Also, teach employees about appropriate personal cleaning practices such as washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not immediately available, ensure employees use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. They should rub their

hands together thoroughly until they are dry.

Make sure you have the supplies to sanitize all surfaces workers will touch.

Follow proper procedures on how to cover coughs and sneezes following CDC recommendations.

Wear a mask at all times when around other people to keep the droplets from spreading the virus.

Encourage driving to worksites or parking areas individually, when possible, without passengers or people in car pools confined together.

Teach types, proper use, limitations, location, handling, decontamination, removal and disposal of any PPE being used.

Teach employees to continue to wear masks that cover their noses and mouths to prevent them from spreading the virus.

There is also a need to continue using other normal control measures, including PPE, necessary to protect workers from other job hazards associated with construction activities.

Use Environmental Protection Agency approved

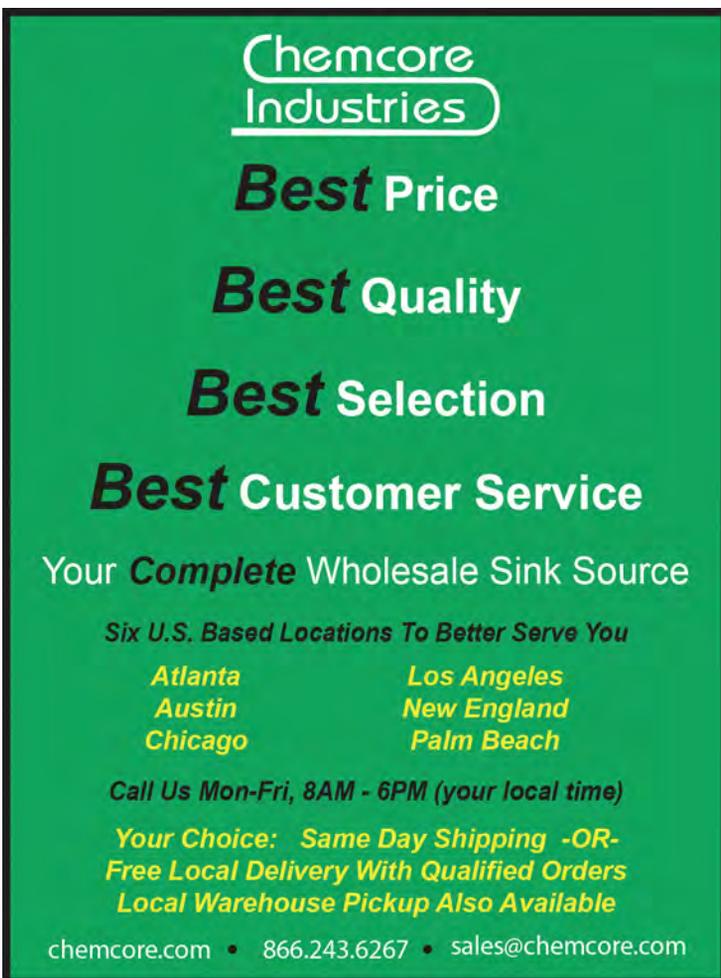
cleaning chemicals with a label that claims it will work to kill the coronavirus for cleaning frequently touched surfaces like tools and their handles.

Ask employees to report any additional safety and health concerns.

Author's Note: This article blends excerpts from www.OSHA.gov, lists of common citations and the required needs for surface fabricators to evaluate their work spaces for possible exposure to COVID-19.

About the Author

Mary Malotke is Senior Engineering Manager for TechneTrain, Inc. TechneTrain has a full line of safety training programs and reference manuals designed for the surface fabrication industry, including a turnkey employee training program for the airborne crystalline silica regulations, a Federal OSHA Compliance Manual, Complete Hazard Communications Guide and Training Set and dozens of other products. All of these numerous training programs are now available in various formats including on flash drives, DVDs and written manuals. These products are available from ISFA at discounted prices. For further information visit www.technetrain.net or call (800) 852-8314.



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