

Consultation helps Small Businesses establish safety and health programs

It's voluntary, free and convenient: consultants perform evaluations on-site

Did you know that OSHA's [Consultation Program](#) provides employers free and confidential onsite safety and health assistance? This service is provided by qualified safety and health professionals who receive additional training from OSHA. Consultation projects are located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. Territories.

How can your worksite take advantage of this resource? First, an employer requests a consultation visit and determines its scope. The visit may comprise a facility safety assessment addressing a single concern or it can be a more comprehensive hazards assessment toward establishing a safety and health management system rather than fixing one problem area.

The consultation begins with an opening conference where the consultant and employer reaffirm the scope of the visit and establish a general agreement on the visit's purpose. The next phase of the visit is a facility walk-around that includes reviewing production processes, evaluating equipment use and identifying hazards in the workplace. This phase also includes reviewing documents and conducting interviews to provide the consultant with a perspective on the quality of the employer's safety and health management system.

After the walkthrough, the consultant holds a closing conference to discuss findings with the employer, including what the company is doing properly regarding safe working conditions and areas that need improvement. The closing conference also provides the opportunity for the consultant and employers to establish mutually agreed upon dates by which hazards identified by the consultant will be corrected by the employer. OSHA grants employers working with a consultation program, a deferral from programmed inspection from the date of the opening conference to the end of the period mutually established by the consultant and the employer for the correction of hazards.

Timothy Parker, Operations Manager for Penn Fibre Plastics, Inc. of Greenwood, DE, said the consultation service benefits small and medium-sized companies by helping them comply with applicable federal regulations. "Consultation's approach of working together with us is highly productive," Parker said. "As a result, the negative stereotype of OSHA as [only] an enforcer and regulator is corrected [in Penn Fibre's case] through the work of the Delaware Office of Safety and Health Consultation Service, which demonstrates that compliance is good for business and good for people."

For many small employers, an additional benefit of receiving consultation assistance is participation the [Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program](#) or SHARP, which recognizes small employers who operate an exemplary safety and health management system. Acceptance into SHARP by OSHA is an achievement that singles out a business among its business peers as a model for worksite safety and health. Upon receiving SHARP recognition, a worksite is exempt from programmed inspections during the period that its SHARP certification is valid.

DeBourgh Manufacturing Company of La Junta, CO is an example of how well consultation services and SHARP can improve a company's safety program. The

company lowered its high injury rates and insurance costs as a result of using the state of Colorado's consultation resources.

"DeBourgh has the highest respect and care for each of its employees," said Steve Berg, President of DeBourgh. "When the possibility for participating in SHARP was proposed to the company, there was no hesitation to pursue this goal."

If you are interested in more information about the Consultation Program, visit OSHA's [Consultation Program](#) Web page.

