

§655. Standards

(a) Promulgation by Secretary of national consensus standards and established Federal standards; time for promulgation; conflicting standards

Without regard to chapter 5 of title 5 or to the other subsections of this section, the Secretary shall, as soon as practicable during the period beginning with the effective date of this chapter and ending two years after such date, by rule promulgate as an occupational safety or health standard any national consensus standard, and any established Federal standard, unless he determines that the promulgation of such a standard would not result in improved safety or health for specifically designated employees. In the event of conflict among any such standards, the Secretary shall promulgate the standard which assures the greatest protection of the safety or health of the affected employees.

(b) Procedure for promulgation, modification, or revocation of standards

The Secretary may by rule promulgate, modify, or revoke any occupational safety or health standard in the following manner:

(1) Whenever the Secretary, upon the basis of information submitted to him in writing by an interested person, a representative of any organization of employers or employees, a nationally recognized standards-producing organization, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, or a State or political subdivision, or on the basis of information developed by the Secretary or otherwise available to him, determines that a rule should be promulgated in order to serve the objectives of this chapter, the Secretary may request the recommendations of an advisory committee appointed under section 656 of this title. The Secretary shall provide such an advisory committee with any proposals of his own or of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, together with all pertinent factual information developed by the Secretary or the Secretary of Health and Human Services, or otherwise available, including the results of research, demonstrations, and experiments. An advisory committee shall submit to the Secretary its recommendations regarding the rule to be promulgated within ninety days from the date of its appointment or within such longer or shorter period as may be prescribed by the Secretary, but in no event for a period which is longer than two hundred and seventy days.

(2) The Secretary shall publish a proposed rule promulgating, modifying, or revoking an occupational safety or health standard in the Federal Register and shall afford interested persons a period of thirty days after publication to submit written data or comments. Where an advisory committee is appointed and the Secretary determines that a rule should be issued, he shall publish the proposed rule within sixty days after the submission of the advisory committee's recommendations or the expiration of the period prescribed by the Secretary for such submission.

(3) On or before the last day of the period provided for the submission of written data or comments under paragraph (2), any interested person may file with the Secretary written objections to the proposed rule, stating the grounds therefor and requesting a public hearing on such objections. Within thirty days after the last day for filing such objections, the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register a notice specifying the occupational safety or health standard to which objections have been filed and a hearing requested, and specifying a time and place for such hearing.

(4) Within sixty days after the expiration of the period provided for the submission of written data or comments under paragraph (2), or within sixty days after the completion of any hearing held under paragraph (3), the Secretary shall issue a rule promulgating, modifying, or revoking an occupational safety or health standard or make a determination that a rule should not be issued. Such a rule may contain a provision delaying its effective date for such period (not in excess of ninety days) as the Secretary determines may be necessary to insure that affected employers and employees will be informed

of the existence of the standard and of its terms and that employers affected are given an opportunity to familiarize themselves and their employees with the existence of the requirements of the standard.

(5) The Secretary, in promulgating standards dealing with toxic materials or harmful physical agents under this subsection, shall set the standard which most adequately assures, to the extent feasible, on the basis of the best available evidence, that no employee will suffer material impairment of health or functional capacity even if such employee has regular exposure to the hazard dealt with by such standard for the period of his working life. Development of standards under this subsection shall be based upon research, demonstrations, experiments, and such other information as may be appropriate. In addition to the attainment of the highest degree of health and safety protection for the employee, other considerations shall be the latest available scientific data in the field, the feasibility of the standards, and experience gained under this and other health and safety laws. Whenever practicable, the standard promulgated shall be expressed in terms of objective criteria and of the performance desired.

(6)(A) Any employer may apply to the Secretary for a temporary order granting a variance from a standard or any provision thereof promulgated under this section. Such temporary order shall be granted only if the employer files an application which meets the requirements of clause (B) and establishes that (i) he is unable to comply with a standard by its effective date because of unavailability of professional or technical personnel or of materials and equipment needed to come into compliance with the standard or because necessary construction or alteration of facilities cannot be completed by the effective date, (ii) he is taking all available steps to safeguard his employees against the hazards covered by the standard, and (iii) he has an effective program for coming into compliance with the standard as quickly as practicable. Any temporary order issued under this paragraph shall prescribe the practices, means, methods, operations, and processes which the employer must adopt and use while the order is in effect and state in detail his program for coming into compliance with the standard. Such a temporary order may be granted only after notice to employees and an opportunity for a hearing: Provided, That the Secretary may issue one interim order to be effective until a decision is made on the basis of the hearing. No temporary order may be in effect for longer than the period needed by the employer to achieve compliance with the standard or one year, whichever is shorter, except that such an order may be renewed not more than twice (I) so long as the requirements of this paragraph are met and (II) if an application for renewal is filed at least 90 days prior to the expiration date of the order. No interim renewal of an order may remain in effect for longer than 180 days.

(B) An application for a temporary order under this paragraph (6) shall contain:

(i) a specification of the standard or portion thereof from which the employer seeks a variance,

(ii) a representation by the employer, supported by representations from qualified persons having firsthand knowledge of the facts represented, that he is unable to comply with the standard or portion thereof and a detailed statement of the reasons therefor,

(iii) a statement of the steps he has taken and will take (with specific dates) to protect employees against the hazard covered by the standard,

(iv) a statement of when he expects to be able to comply with the standard and what steps he has taken and what steps he will take (with dates specified) to come into compliance with the standard, and

(v) a certification that he has informed his employees of the application by giving a copy thereof to their authorized representative, posting a statement giving a summary of the application and specifying where a copy may be examined at the place or places where notices to employees are normally posted, and by other appropriate means.

A description of how employees have been informed shall be contained in the certification. The information to employees shall also inform them of their right to petition the Secretary for a hearing.

(C) The Secretary is authorized to grant a variance from any standard or portion thereof whenever he determines, or the Secretary of Health and Human Services certifies, that such variance is necessary to permit an employer to participate in an experiment approved by him or the Secretary of Health and Human Services designed to demonstrate or validate new and improved techniques to safeguard the health or safety of workers.

(7) Any standard promulgated under this subsection shall prescribe the use of labels or other appropriate forms of warning as are necessary to insure that employees are apprised of all hazards to which they are exposed, relevant symptoms and appropriate emergency treatment, and proper conditions and precautions of safe use or exposure. Where appropriate, such standard shall also prescribe suitable protective equipment and control or technological procedures to be used in connection with such hazards and shall provide for monitoring or measuring employee exposure at such locations and intervals, and in such manner as may be necessary for the protection of employees. In addition, where appropriate, any such standard shall prescribe the type and frequency of medical examinations or other tests which shall be made available, by the employer or at his cost, to employees exposed to such hazards in order to most effectively determine whether the health of such employees is adversely affected by such exposure. In the event such medical examinations are in the nature of research, as determined by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, such examinations may be furnished at the expense of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. The results of such examinations or tests shall be furnished only to the Secretary or the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and, at the request of the employee, to his physician. The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, may by rule promulgated pursuant to section 553 of title 5, make appropriate modifications in the foregoing requirements relating to the use of labels or other forms of warning, monitoring or measuring, and medical examinations, as may be warranted by experience, information, or medical or technological developments acquired subsequent to the promulgation of the relevant standard.

(8) Whenever a rule promulgated by the Secretary differs substantially from an existing national consensus standard, the Secretary shall, at the same time, publish in the Federal Register a statement of the reasons why the rule as adopted will better effectuate the purposes of this chapter than the national consensus standard.

(c) Emergency temporary standards

(1) The Secretary shall provide, without regard to the requirements of chapter 5 of title 5, for an emergency temporary standard to take immediate effect upon publication in the Federal Register if he determines (A) that employees are exposed to grave danger from exposure to substances or agents determined to be toxic or physically harmful or from new hazards, and (B) that such emergency standard is necessary to protect employees from such danger.

(2) Such standard shall be effective until superseded by a standard promulgated in accordance with the procedures prescribed in paragraph (3) of this subsection.

(3) Upon publication of such standard in the Federal Register the Secretary shall commence a proceeding in accordance with subsection (b) of this section, and the standard as published shall also serve as a proposed rule for the proceeding. The Secretary shall promulgate a standard under this

paragraph no later than six months after publication of the emergency standard as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection.

(d) Variances from standards; procedure

Any affected employer may apply to the Secretary for a rule or order for a variance from a standard promulgated under this section. Affected employees shall be given notice of each such application and an opportunity to participate in a hearing. The Secretary shall issue such rule or order if he determines on the record, after opportunity for an inspection where appropriate and a hearing, that the proponent of the variance has demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that the conditions, practices, means, methods, operations, or processes used or proposed to be used by an employer will provide employment and places of employment to his employees which are as safe and healthful as those which would prevail if he complied with the standard. The rule or order so issued shall prescribe the conditions the employer must maintain, and the practices, means, methods, operations, and processes which he must adopt and utilize to the extent they differ from the standard in question. Such a rule or order may be modified or revoked upon application by an employer, employees, or by the Secretary on his own motion, in the manner prescribed for its issuance under this subsection at any time after six months from its issuance.

(e) Statement of reasons for Secretary's determinations; publication in Federal Register

Whenever the Secretary promulgates any standard, makes any rule, order, or decision, grants any exemption or extension of time, or compromises, mitigates, or settles any penalty assessed under this chapter, he shall include a statement of the reasons for such action, which shall be published in the Federal Register.

(f) Judicial review

Any person who may be adversely affected by a standard issued under this section may at any time prior to the sixtieth day after such standard is promulgated file a petition challenging the validity of such standard with the United States court of appeals for the circuit wherein such person resides or has his principal place of business, for a judicial review of such standard. A copy of the petition shall be forthwith transmitted by the clerk of the court to the Secretary. The filing of such petition shall not, unless otherwise ordered by the court, operate as a stay of the standard. The determinations of the Secretary shall be conclusive if supported by substantial evidence in the record considered as a whole.

(g) Priority for establishment of standards

In determining the priority for establishing standards under this section, the Secretary shall give due regard to the urgency of the need for mandatory safety and health standards for particular industries, trades, crafts, occupations, businesses, workplaces or work environments. The Secretary shall also give due regard to the recommendations of the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding the need for mandatory standards in determining the priority for establishing such standards.

(Pub. L. 91-596, §6, Dec. 29, 1970, 84 Stat. 1593; Pub. L. 96-88, title V, §509(b), Oct. 17, 1979, 93 Stat. 695.)

References in Text

The effective date of this chapter, referred to in subsec. (a), is the effective date of Pub. L. 91-596, Dec. 29, 1970, 84 Stat. 1590, which is 120 days after Dec. 29, 1970, see section 34 of Pub. L. 91-596, set out as an Effective Date note under section 651 of this title.

Change of Name

“Secretary of Health and Human Services” substituted for “Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare” in subsecs. (b)(1), (6)(C), (7), and (g) pursuant to section 509(b) of Pub. L. 96-88 which is classified to section 3508(b) of Title 20, Education.

Termination of Advisory Committees

Advisory committees in existence on January 5, 1973, to terminate not later than the expiration of the 2-year period following January 5, 1973, unless, in the case of a committee established by the President or an officer of the Federal Government, such committee is renewed by appropriate action prior to the expiration of such 2-year period, or in the case of a committee established by the Congress, its duration is otherwise provided by law. See section 14 of Pub. L. 92-463, Oct. 6, 1972, 86 Stat. 776, set out in the Appendix to Title 5, Government Organization and Employees.

Prohibition on Exposure of Workers to Chemical or Other Hazards for Purpose of Conducting Experiments

Pub. L. 102-394, title I, §102, Oct. 6, 1992, 106 Stat. 1799, provided that: “None of the funds appropriated under this Act or subsequent Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Acts shall be used to grant variances, interim orders or letters of clarification to employers which will allow exposure of workers to chemicals or other workplace hazards in excess of existing Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards for the purpose of conducting experiments on workers’ health or safety.”

Similar provisions were contained in the following prior appropriation acts:

Pub. L. 102-170, title I, §102, Nov. 26, 1991, 105 Stat. 1114.

Pub. L. 101-517, title I, §102, Nov. 5, 1990, 104 Stat. 2196.

Pub. L. 101-166, title I, §102, Nov. 21, 1989, 103 Stat. 1165.

Pub. L. 100-202, §101(h) [title I, §102], Dec. 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 1329-256, 1329-263.

Pub. L. 99-500, §101(i) [H.R. 5233, title I, §102], Oct. 18, 1986, 100 Stat. 1783-287, and Pub. L. 99-591, §101(i) [H.R. 5233, title I, §102], Oct. 30, 1986, 100 Stat. 3341-287.

Pub. L. 99-178, title I, §102, Dec. 12, 1985, 99 Stat. 1109.

Pub. L. 98-619, title I, §102, Nov. 8, 1984, 98 Stat. 3311.

Occupational Health Standard Concerning Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens

Pub. L. 102-170, title I, §100, Nov. 26, 1991, 105 Stat. 1113, provided that:

“(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, on or before December 1, 1991, the Secretary of Labor, acting under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 [29 U.S.C. 651 et seq.], shall promulgate a final occupational health standard concerning occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens. The final standard shall be based on the proposed standard as published in the Federal Register on May 30, 1989 (54 FR 23042), concerning occupational exposures to the hepatitis B virus, the human immunodeficiency virus and other bloodborne pathogens.

“(b) In the event that the final standard referred to in subsection (a) is not promulgated by the date required under such subsection, the proposed standard on occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens as published in the Federal Register on May 30, 1989 (54 FR 23042) shall become effective as if such proposed standard had been promulgated as a final standard by the Secretary of Labor, and remain in effect until the date on which such Secretary promulgates the final standard referred to in subsection (a).

“(c) Nothing in this Act [enacting section 962 of Title 30, Mineral Lands and Mining, amending section 290b of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare, enacting provisions set out as notes under section 1070a of Title 20, Education and section 1383 of Title 42, and amending provisions set out as notes under section 1255a of Title 8, Aliens and Nationality, and section 1221–1 of Title 20] shall be construed to require the Secretary of Labor (acting through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) to revise the employment accident reporting regulations published at 29 C.F.R. 1904.8.”

Retention of Markings and Placards

Pub. L. 101–615, §29, Nov. 16, 1990, 104 Stat. 3277, provided that: “Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this Act [Nov. 16, 1990], the Secretary of Labor, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation and the Secretary of the Treasury, shall issue under section 6(b) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (29 U.S.C. 655(b)) standards requiring any employer who receives a package, container, motor vehicle, rail freight car, aircraft, or vessel which contains a hazardous material and which is required to be marked, placarded, or labeled in accordance with regulations issued under the Hazardous Materials Transportation Act [former 49 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.] to retain the markings, placards, and labels, and any other information as may be required by such regulations on the package, container, motor vehicle, rail freight car, aircraft, or vessel, until the hazardous materials have been removed therefrom.”

Chemical Process Safety Management

Pub. L. 101–549, title III, §304, Nov. 15, 1990, 104 Stat. 2576, provided that:

“(a) Chemical Process Safety Standard.—The Secretary of Labor shall act under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (29 U.S.C. 653) [29 U.S.C. 651 et seq.] to prevent accidental releases of chemicals which could pose a threat to employees. Not later than 12 months after the date of enactment of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 [Nov. 15, 1990], the Secretary of Labor, in coordination with the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, shall promulgate, pursuant to the Occupational Safety and Health Act, a chemical process safety standard designed to protect employees from hazards associated with accidental releases of highly hazardous chemicals in the workplace.

“(b) List of Highly Hazardous Chemicals.—The Secretary shall include as part of such standard a list of highly hazardous chemicals, which include toxic, flammable, highly reactive and explosive substances. The list of such chemicals may include those chemicals listed by the Administrator under section 302 of the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986 [42 U.S.C. 11002]. The Secretary may make additions to such list when a substance is found to pose a threat of serious injury or fatality in the event of an accidental release in the workplace.

“(c) Elements of Safety Standard.—Such standard shall, at minimum, require employers to—

“(1) develop and maintain written safety information identifying workplace chemical and process hazards, equipment used in the processes, and technology used in the processes;

“(2) perform a workplace hazard assessment, including, as appropriate, identification of potential sources of accidental releases, an identification of any previous release within the facility which had a likely potential for catastrophic consequences in the workplace, estimation of workplace effects of a range of releases, estimation of the health and safety effects of such range on employees;

“(3) consult with employees and their representatives on the development and conduct of hazard assessments and the development of chemical accident prevention plans and provide access to these and other records required under the standard;

“(4) establish a system to respond to the workplace hazard assessment findings, which shall address prevention, mitigation, and emergency responses;

“(5) periodically review the workplace hazard assessment and response system;

“(6) develop and implement written operating procedures for the chemical process including procedures for each operating phase, operating limitations, and safety and health considerations;

“(7) provide written safety and operating information to employees and train employees in operating procedures, emphasizing hazards and safe practices;

“(8) ensure contractors and contract employees are provided appropriate information and training;

“(9) train and educate employees and contractors in emergency response in a manner as comprehensive and effective as that required by the regulation promulgated pursuant to section 126(d) of the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act [of 1986] [Pub. L. 99–499, set out in a note below];

“(10) establish a quality assurance program to ensure that initial process related equipment, maintenance materials, and spare parts are fabricated and installed consistent with design specifications;

“(11) establish maintenance systems for critical process related equipment including written procedures, employee training, appropriate inspections, and testing of such equipment to ensure ongoing mechanical integrity;

“(12) conduct pre-start-up safety reviews of all newly installed or modified equipment;

“(13) establish and implement written procedures to manage change to process chemicals, technology, equipment and facilities; and

“(14) investigate every incident which results in or could have resulted in a major accident in the workplace, with any findings to be reviewed by operating personnel and modifications made if appropriate.

“(d) State Authority.—Nothing in this section may be construed to diminish the authority of the States and political subdivisions thereof as described in section 112(r)(11) of the Clean Air Act [42 U.S.C. 7412(r)(11)].”

Worker Protection Standards

Pub. L. 99–499, title I, §126(a)–(f), Oct. 17, 1986, 100 Stat. 1690–1692, as amended by Pub. L. 100–202, §101(f) [title II, §201], Dec. 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 1329–187, 1329–198, provided:

“(a) Promulgation.—Within one year after the date of the enactment of this section [Oct. 17, 1986], the Secretary of Labor shall, pursuant to section 6 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 [29 U.S.C. 655], promulgate standards for the health and safety protection of employees engaged in hazardous waste operations.

“(b) Proposed Standards.—The Secretary of Labor shall issue proposed regulations on such standards which shall include, but need not be limited to, the following worker protection provisions:

“(1) Site analysis.—Requirements for a formal hazard analysis of the site and development of a site specific plan for worker protection.

“(2) Training.—Requirements for contractors to provide initial and routine training of workers before such workers are permitted to engage in hazardous waste operations which would expose them to toxic substances.

“(3) Medical surveillance.—A program of regular medical examination, monitoring, and surveillance of workers engaged in hazardous waste operations which would expose them to toxic substances.

“(4) Protective equipment.—Requirements for appropriate personal protective equipment, clothing, and respirators for work in hazardous waste operations.

“(5) Engineering controls.—Requirements for engineering controls concerning the use of equipment and exposure of workers engaged in hazardous waste operations.

“(6) Maximum exposure limits.—Requirements for maximum exposure limitations for workers engaged in hazardous waste operations, including necessary monitoring and assessment procedures.

“(7) Informational program.—A program to inform workers engaged in hazardous waste operations of the nature and degree of toxic exposure likely as a result of such hazardous waste operations.

“(8) Handling.—Requirements for the handling, transporting, labeling, and disposing of hazardous wastes.

“(9) New technology program.—A program for the introduction of new equipment or technologies that will maintain worker protections.

“(10) Decontamination procedures.—Procedures for decontamination.

“(11) Emergency response.—Requirements for emergency response and protection of workers engaged in hazardous waste operations.

“(c) Final Regulations.—Final regulations under subsection (a) shall take effect one year after the date they are promulgated. In promulgating final regulations on standards under subsection (a), the Secretary of Labor shall include each of the provisions listed in paragraphs (1) through (11) of subsection (b) unless the Secretary determines that the evidence in the public record considered as a whole does not support inclusion of any such provision.

“(d) Specific Training Standards.—

“(1) Offsite instruction; field experience.—Standards promulgated under subsection (a) shall include training standards requiring that general site workers (such as equipment operators, general laborers, and other supervised personnel) engaged in hazardous substance removal or other activities which expose or potentially expose such workers to hazardous substances receive a minimum of 40 hours of initial instruction off the site, and a minimum of three days of actual field experience under the direct supervision of a trained, experienced supervisor, at the time of assignment. The requirements of the preceding sentence shall not apply to any general site worker who has received the equivalent of such training. Workers who may be exposed to unique or special hazards shall be provided additional training.

“(2) Training of supervisors.—Standards promulgated under subsection (a) shall include training standards requiring that onsite managers and supervisors directly responsible for the hazardous waste operations (such as foremen) receive the same training as general site workers set forth in paragraph (1)

of this subsection and at least eight additional hours of specialized training on managing hazardous waste operations. The requirements of the preceding sentence shall not apply to any person who has received the equivalent of such training.

“(3) Certification; enforcement.—Such training standards shall contain provisions for certifying that general site workers, onsite managers, and supervisors have received the specified training and shall prohibit any individual who has not received the specified training from engaging in hazardous waste operations covered by the standard. The certification procedures shall be no less comprehensive than those adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency in its Model Accreditation Plan for Asbestos Abatement Training as required under the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986 [Pub. L. 99–519, see Short Title of 1986 Amendment note, set out under section 2601 of Title 15, Commerce and Trade].

“(4) Training of emergency response personnel.—Such training standards shall set forth requirements for the training of workers who are responsible for responding to hazardous emergency situations who may be exposed to toxic substances in carrying out their responsibilities.

“(e) Interim Regulations.—The Secretary of Labor shall issue interim final regulations under this section within 60 days after the enactment of this section [Oct. 17, 1986] which shall provide no less protection under this section for workers employed by contractors and emergency response workers than the protections contained in the Environmental Protection Agency Manual (1981) ‘Health and Safety Requirements for Employees Engaged in Field Activities’ and existing standards under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 [29 U.S.C. 651 et seq.] found in subpart C of part 1926 of title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Such interim final regulations shall take effect upon issuance and shall apply until final regulations become effective under subsection (c).

“(f) Coverage of Certain State and Local Employees.—Not later than 90 days after the promulgation of final regulations under subsection (a), the Administrator shall promulgate standards identical to those promulgated by the Secretary of Labor under subsection (a). Standards promulgated under this subsection shall apply to employees of State and local governments in each State which does not have in effect an approved State plan under section 18 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 [29 U.S.C. 667] providing for standards for the health and safety protection of employees engaged in hazardous waste operations.”