

employer in establishing and maintaining effective programs for providing safe and healthful places of employment for employees, in accord with the requirements of the applicable State or Federal laws and regulations. The State shall explain that while utilizing this service, an employer remains under a statutory obligation to provide safe and healthful work and working conditions for employees. In addition, while the identification of hazards by a consultant will not mandate the issuance of citations or penalties, the employer is required to take necessary action to eliminate employee exposure to a hazard which in the judgment of the consultant represents an imminent danger to employees, and to take action to correct within a reasonable time a hazard which would be classified as a serious hazard. The State shall emphasize, however, that the discovery of such a hazard will not initiate any enforcement activity, and that referral will not take place, unless the employer fails to eliminate the identified hazard within the established time frame. The State shall also explain that when an employer requests and receives a consultative visit covering all conditions and operations in the place of employment related to occupational safety and health and meets the other conditions set forth in § 1908.7(b)(4), the employer may, upon request, be exempt from a general schedule OSHA enforcement inspection for a period of one year from the end of the closing conference of the consultative visit.

(b) *Employer requests.* (1) An onsite consultative visit will be provided only at the request of the employer, and shall not result from the enforcement of any right of entry under State law.

(2) When making a request, an employer in a small, high hazard establishment shall generally be encouraged to include within the scope of such request all working conditions at the worksite and the employer's entire safety and health program. However, a more limited scope may be encouraged in larger and less hazardous establishments. Moreover, any employer may specify a more limited scope for the visit by indicating working conditions, hazards, or situations on which onsite consultation will be focused. When

such limited requests are at issue, the consultant will limit review and provide assistance only with respect to those working conditions, hazards, or situations specified; except that if the consultant observes, in the course of the onsite visit, hazards which are outside the scope of the request, the consultant must treat such hazards as though they were within the scope of the request.

(3) Employers may request onsite consultation to assist in the abatement of hazards cited during an OSHA enforcement inspection. However, an onsite consultative visit may not take place after an inspection until the conditions set forth in § 1908.7(b)(3) have been met.

(c) *Scheduling priority.* Priority shall be assigned to requests from businesses with the most hazardous operations, with primary attention to smaller businesses. Preference shall be given to the smaller businesses which are in higher hazard industries or which have the most hazardous conditions at issue in the request.

§ 1908.6 Conduct of a visit.

(a) *Preparation.* (1) An onsite consultative visit shall be made only after appropriate preparation by the consultant. Prior to the visit, the consultant shall become familiar with as many factors concerning the establishment's operation as possible. The consultant shall review all applicable codes and standards. In addition, the consultant shall assure that all necessary technical and personal protective equipment is available and functioning properly.

(2) At the time of any promotional visit conducted by a consultant to encourage the use of the onsite consultative services, a consultation may be performed without delay if the employer so requests and the consultant is otherwise prepared to conduct such consultation.

(b) *Structured format.* An initial onsite consultative visit will consist of an opening conference, an examination of those aspects of the employer's safety and health program which relate to the scope of the visit, a walk through the workplace, and a closing conference. An initial visit may include training

and education for employers and employees, if the need for such training and education is revealed by the walk through the workplace and the examination of the employer's safety and health program and if the employer so requests. The visit shall be followed by a written report to the employer. Additional visits may be conducted as the employer requests to provide needed education and training, assistance with the employer's safety and health program, or technical assistance in the correction of hazards, or as necessary to verify the correction of serious hazards identified during previous visits. A compliance inspection may, in some cases, be the basis for a visit limited to education and training, assistance with the employer's safety and health program, or technical assistance in the correction of hazards.

(c) *Employee participation.* (1) The consultant shall retain the right to confer with individual employees during the course of the visit in order to identify and judge the nature and extent of particular hazards within the scope of the employer's request, and to evaluate the employer's safety and health program. The consultant shall explain the necessity for this contact to the employer during the opening conference, and an employer must agree to permit such contact before a visit can proceed.

(2) In addition, employees, their representatives, and members of a workplace joint safety and health committee may participate in the onsite consultative visit to the extent desired by the employer. In the opening conference, the consultant shall encourage the employer to allow employee participation to the fullest extent practicable.

(d) *Opening conference.* In addition to the requirements of § 1908.6(c), the consultant shall, in the opening conference, explain to the employer the relationship between onsite consultation and OSHA enforcement activity and shall explain the obligation to protect employees in the event that certain hazardous conditions are identified.

(e) *Onsite activity.* (1) Activity during the onsite consultative visit will focus primarily on those areas, conditions, or hazards regarding which the employer has requested assistance. An employer

may expand or reduce the scope of the request at any time during the onsite visit. The consultant shall, if prepared and if scheduling priorities permit, expand the scope of the visit at the time of the request. If the employer's request for expansion necessitates further preparation by the consultant or the expertise of another consultant, or if other employer requests may merit higher priority, the consultant shall refer the request to the consultation manager for scheduling. In all cases in which the scope of the visit is reduced, the consultant remains obligated to work with the employer to ensure correction of those serious hazards which are identified during the visit.

(2) The consultant shall advise the employer as to the employer's obligations and responsibilities under applicable Federal or State law and implementing regulations.

(3) Within the scope of the employer's request, consultants shall review the employer's safety and health program and provide advice on modifications or additions to make such programs more effective.

(4) Consultants shall identify and provide advice on correction of those hazards included in the employer's request and any other safety or health hazards observed in the workplace during the course of the onsite consultative visit. This advice shall include basic information indicating the possibility of a solution and describing the general form of the solution. The consultant shall conduct sampling and testing, with subsequent analyses, as may be necessary to confirm the existence of safety and health hazards.

(5) Advice and technical assistance on the correction of identified safety and health hazards may be provided to employers during and after the onsite consultative visit. Descriptive materials may be provided on approaches, means, techniques, and other appropriate items commonly utilized for the elimination or control of such hazards. The consultants shall also advise the employers of additional sources of assistance, if known.

(6) When a hazard is identified in the workplace, the consultant shall indicate to the employer the consultant's

best judgment as to whether the situation would be classified as a "serious" or "other-than-serious" hazard.

(7) At the time the consultant determines that an identified serious hazard exists, the consultant shall assist the employer to develop a specific plan to correct the hazard, affording the employer a reasonable period of time to complete the necessary action. The State shall provide, upon request from the employer within 15 working days of receipt of the consultant's report, an opportunity for an expeditious informal discussion with the consultation manager regarding the period of time established for the correction of a hazard or any other substantive finding of the consultant.

(8) The employer shall be encouraged to advise affected employees of the hazards when they are identified, and to notify them of their correction.

(f) *Employer obligations.* (1) An employer must take immediate action to eliminate employee exposure to a hazard which, in the judgment of the consultant, presents an imminent danger to employees. If the employer fails to take the necessary action, the consultant must immediately notify the affected employees and the appropriate OSHA enforcement authority and provide the relevant information.

(2) An employer must also take the necessary action in accordance with the plan developed under §1908.6(e)(7) to eliminate or control employee exposure to any identified serious hazard. In order to demonstrate that the necessary action is being taken, an employer may be required to submit periodic reports, permit a followup visit, or take similar action.

(3) An employer may request, and the consultation manager may grant, an extension of the time frame established for correction of a serious hazard when the employer demonstrates having made a good faith effort to correct the hazard within the established time frame; shows evidence that correction has not been completed because of factors beyond the employer's reasonable control; and shows evidence that the employer is taking all available interim steps to safeguard the employees

against the hazard during the correction period.

(4) If the employer fails to take the action necessary to correct a serious hazard within the established time frame or any extensions thereof, the consultation manager shall immediately notify the appropriate OSHA enforcement authority and provide the relevant information. The OSHA enforcement authority will make a determination, based on a review of the facts, whether enforcement activity is warranted.

(5) After correction of all serious hazards, the employer shall notify the consultation manager by written confirmation of the correction of the hazards, unless correction of the serious hazards is verified by direct observation by the consultant.

(g) *Written report.* A written report shall be prepared for each visit which results in substantive findings or recommendations, and shall be sent to the employer. The timing and format of the report shall be approved by the Assistant Secretary. The report shall restate the employer's request and describe the working conditions examined by the consultant; shall, within the scope of the request, evaluate the employer's program for ensuring safe and healthful employment and provide recommendations for making such programs effective; shall identify specific hazards and describe their nature, including reference to applicable standards or codes; shall identify the seriousness of the hazards; and, to the extent possible, shall include suggested means or approaches to their correction. Additional sources of assistance shall also be indicated, if known, including the possible need to procure specific engineering consultation, medical advice and assistance, and other appropriate items. The report shall also include reference to the completion dates for the situations described in §1908.6(f)(1) and (2).

(h) *Confidentiality.* The consultant shall preserve the confidentiality of information obtained as the result of a consultative visit which contains or

might reveal a trade secret of the employer.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1218-0110)

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§ 1908.7 Relationship to enforcement.

(a) *Independence.* (1) Consultative activity by a State shall be conducted independently of any OSHA enforcement activity.

(2) The consultative activity shall have its own identifiable managerial staff. In States with Plans approved under section 18 of the Act, this staff will be separate from the managing of compliance inspections and scheduling.

(3) The identity of employers requesting onsite consultation, as well as the file of the consultant's visit, shall not be forwarded or provided to OSHA for use in any compliance inspection or scheduling activity, except as provided for in § 1908.6(f) (1) and (4) and § 1908.7(b)(4).

(b) *Effect upon scheduling.* (1) An onsite consultative visit already in progress will have priority over OSHA compliance inspections except as provided in § 1908.7(b)(2). The consultant and the employer shall notify the compliance officer of the visit in progress and request delay of the inspection until after the visit is completed. An onsite consultative visit shall be considered in progress in relation to the working conditions, hazards, or situations covered by the request from the beginning of the opening conference through the end of the closing conference; except that for periods which exceed 30 days from the initiation of the opening conference, the RA may determine that the inspection will proceed. For working conditions, hazards, or situations not covered by the request, the onsite consultative visit shall be considered in progress only while the consultant is at the place of employment.

(2) The consultant shall terminate an onsite consultative visit already in progress where one of the following kinds of OSHA compliance inspections is about to take place:

(i) Imminent danger investigations;

(ii) Fatality/catastrophe investigations;

(iii) Complaint investigations;

(iv) Other critical inspections as determined by the Assistant Secretary.

(3) An onsite consultation visit may not take place while an OSHA enforcement inspection is in progress at the establishment. An enforcement inspection shall be deemed "in progress" from the time a compliance officer initially seeks entry to the workplace to the end of the closing conference. An enforcement inspection will also be considered "in progress" in cases where entry is refused, until such times as: the inspection is conducted; the RA determines that a warrant to require entry to the workplace will not be sought; or the RA determines that allowing a consultative visit to proceed is in the best interest of employee safety and health. An onsite consultative visit shall not take place subsequent to an OSHA enforcement inspection until a determination has been made that no citation will be issued, or if a citation is issued, onsite consultation shall only take place with regard to those citation items which have become final orders.

(4) When an employer requests and undergoes a consultative visit at an establishment covering all conditions and operations in the place of employment related to occupational safety and health; corrects all hazards that have been identified during the course of the consultative visit within established time frames, and posts notice of their correction when such is completed; demonstrates to the consultant that certain core elements of an effective safety and health program are in effect, and that the remaining elements of an effective safety and health program will be implemented within a reasonable, established time frame; and agrees to request a consultative visit if major changes in working conditions or work processes occur which may introduce new hazards, the employer may, upon request, be exempt from a general schedule OSHA enforcement inspection for a period of one year from the end of the closing conference of the consultative visit. Between the time of election to participate in the process required to qualify