

Protecting workers with stiffer safety penalties

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The new year could be a safer one for workers. A law passed by Congress last October will increase civil fines for violators of workplace safety standards. And to boost accountability further, the Departments of Justice and Labor are teaming up to couple worker safety with harsher criminal penalties, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

Jyllian Kemsley, a senior editor at C&EN, reports that the last time civil penalties for workplace safety violations went up was 25 years ago, and they weren't pegged to inflation. The 2015 law will allow the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) to increase fines, which are expected to rise by about 80 percent. The maximum charge for a serious violation would jump from \$7,000 to \$12,600. For repeated or willful offenses, the fine would climb from \$70,000 to \$126,000.

However, the law doesn't change criminal penalties for willful violations of safety standards, even those that lead to a worker's death. These remain misdemeanors. To better deter employers from deliberate misconduct, the Departments of Justice and Labor expanded an initiative to couple worker safety prosecutions to other possible crimes, such as environmental violations, fraud or obstructing justice.

More information: Tougher Safety Penalties on Deck, [cen.acs.org/articles/94/i2/Che ... -Tougher-Worker.html](http://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i2/Che...-Tougher-Worker.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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