

OSHA PROPOSES OVER A MILLION DOLLARS IN PENALTIES FOR HOUSTON COMPANY



The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) recently cited a company in Houston, TX, for safety violations. The DOL's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) proposed a fine in excess of one million dollars. Piping Technology and Products, Inc. was cited for 13 "willful" and 17 "serious" violations that might put employees at risk of amputations or similar injuries from hazardous machinery. The company's facility in Houston included additional hazards, all of which led the OSHA to recommend penalizing the business a total of 1,013,000 dollars. A company employee contacted OSHA earlier in the year and claimed that Piping Technology's facility harbored a lack of brakes on overhead cranes and unguarded presses. Based on this information, the OSHA's Houston South Area Office initiated an investigation. The worker's complaint was verified, and the inspection exposed additional dangers, such as employees allowed to cut metal I-beams and pipes without the proper machine guarding. Likewise, during maintenance on the machines, improper safeguards resulted in workers being vulnerable to the unexpected release of stored energy. "Repeatedly ignoring the law while risking workers' lives and providing misleading information to federal investigators will not be tolerated," said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis, in a DOL press release on its



website. "Employers who endanger the lives and limbs of their employees must be held accountable." The violations deemed "willful" by the OSHA included a failure to guard seven band saws and a failure to lock out all sources of hazardous energy to six pieces of equipment prior to service and maintenance. There is a penalty of 70,000 dollars per each 13 citations, totaling 910,000 dollars. A willful violation is one perpetrated with complete disregard for requirements by law or a lack of concern for the safety and health of employees. A "serious" violation is defined as one in which there exists a significant possibility of death or serious physical harm from a hazard, a likelihood of which an employer is aware or should have been aware. The 17 serious violations cited by the OSHA including a failure to properly guard other machines and grinders, failure to securely close openings on electrical equipment, failure to supply fall protection training, and failure to ensure that workers exposed to overhead hazards wore hard hats. All 17 of these violations equal 103,000 dollars. Assistant Secretary of Labor for the OSHA, Dr. David Michaels, summarized the company's violations by stating, "Piping Technology deliberately exposed its workers who operate band saws and other dangerous machinery to amputation hazards while misleading OSHA investigators about the use of these machines." The company had previously been issued citations in 1986, 1994, 2004 and 2005 addressing the need to guard band saws used in production. Piping Technology has been placed in the OSHA's Severe Violator Enforcement Program. It now has 15 business days from receipt of the citations to comply, request an "informal conference" with an OSHA representative, or contest the citations and penalties.