



Crowd Control Tips From OSHA

Insights

12.01.10

In 2008, an employee of a major retailer was trampled to death by a stampede of customers surging into the store looking for Black Friday deals. On the same day, two customers in another chain had a shooting match resulting in both dying, although it does not appear to have been a shopping-related incident.

While it's hard to determine the number of non-fatal injuries occurring during the Black Friday rush, there are likely many. Since these incidents, OSHA has taken a keen interest in this potential workplace hazard. As the holidays approach, OSHA has taken the unusual step of sending a letter to fourteen major retailers forwarding its recommendations for preventing injuries from large crowds. Among those receiving the letter were the CEOs of Apple, Target, Macy's, and IKEA.

OSHA's Word To The Wise

In the letter, Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, David Michaels wrote: "OSHA encourages employers to plan for crowd management several weeks, or even months, in advance of sales events that draw large crowds. We recommend that employers and retail store owners adopt a plan that includes, at a minimum, the elements outlined in the fact sheet." He also noted that OSHA issued a citation to the retailer that was involved in the employee's unfortunate death.

Retailers should not take these comments lightly. Mr. Michaels' letter clearly had a preventive intent, and sending the letter to major retailers likely was an effort to draw attention to these perils. Remember that, under the current administration, OSHA is heavily focused on the penalty side of the fence. Undoubtedly, this letter and resulting publicity will be used by OSHA to increase fines for non-compliance in the event of a workplace injury resulting from large crowds during the holiday season.

Things You Can And Should Be Doing

Many of OSHA's tips are very practical and fairly simple. For example, providing clear signage that identifies all entrances and egresses from the premises; having adequate employees stationed at key places throughout the store where injuries might occur such as the entrance; using barricades to create orderly lines that prevent a mass group from surging to the entrance; and placing shopping carts or other mobile items in the store instead of in the parking lot where they can become hazards to the traffic. Many retailers are undoubtedly doing some or all of these things already.

Perhaps the most important recommendation is to communicate with the crowd. People who are not told what to expect become frustrated and irritable, much like not being told why you are sitting on the tarmac in an airplane. People who are instructed in how the process will work, how long they will be waiting, and why the measures are in place, for their safety, should be less likely to turn unruly. Finally, it is critical to train your employees to identify and correct hazards as they occur. Nothing can do more to prevent injuries than a well-trained staff.

A full version of OSHA's guidelines can be found at <http://www.osha.gov/>.

Related People



Edward F. Harold
Regional Managing Partner
504.592.3801
Email