



OSHA's Foulke Tale: Ed Foulke Reflects On His Tenure

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During Ed Foulke's tenure as the head of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, Ed Foulke emphasized assistance, rather than inspections and enforcement, to improve safety. In the June 30, 2014 Workforce article "OSHA's Foulke Tale: Ed Foulke Reflects on His Tenure," Ed reflects on how he decided to get involved in workplace safety.

A construction worker in Tennessee stood halfway up a 3-foot ladder at his work site. He lost his balance, fell backward and landed headfirst. Although he only fell about 36 inches — a seemingly safe height — his injuries proved fatal.

The unfortunate incident occurred in 1980 when a young Ed was working as a labor and employment attorney at a Greenville, South Carolina, law firm that represented the Tennessee-based construction company. He was visiting the work site when the fatality occurred, and, as the only lawyer on site, he was walked through the post-workplace fatality procedures over the phone by a colleague back in Greenville.

It was the first time the future head of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration dealt with a workplace fatality — or even with OSHA, for that matter. From that experience, Ed, who received his law degree from Loyola University New Orleans, learned "that people die very easily," and it was one factor that pushed him into a career dedicated to improving safety in the workplace.

"It was a multilevel thing," he said about his decision to get involved with workplace health and safety. "I was helping people stay healthy and alive at the work site. I was helping the work site be safer, and helping my clients improve their safety programs."

Through his work, Ed, 61, who served as OSHA's head from April 2006 to November 2008 under President George W. Bush, found purpose helping businesses remain compliant with the myriad safety regulations governing workplaces in the U.S., especially small- to medium-size employers.

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