

More Discussion of Possible Abuse of OSHA's Proposed Data Initiative

Insights

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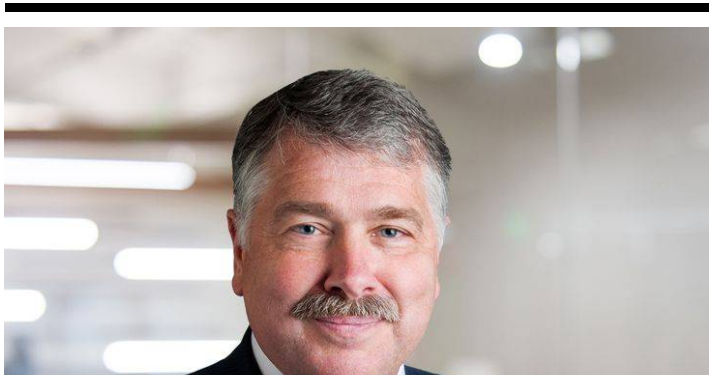
The Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration has announced a proposed rule which will require establishments with 20 or more employees in certain industries with high injury and illness rates to submit electronically their summary of work-related injuries and illnesses to OSHA every year. The change may affect between 450,000 and 1,500,000 sites. The first proposed new requirement is for establishments with more than 250 employees (and who are already required to keep records) to electronically submit the records on a quarterly basis to OSHA.

Currently, OSHA requires approximately 80,000 employers per year to submit data as part of its OSHA Data Initiative. OSHA uses its data to target certain industries or establishments for inspections and other initiatives. The Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys another 250,000 sites.

One can see many ways in which OSHA could use this data for more effective targeting. The biggest concern seems to be how others would use this data, which OSHA would make accessible to the public. On first blush, one could argue that there is no downside to sharing individual employers' injury-and-illness summaries. If properly handled, no "identifiable" embarrassing individual employee information would be available. But when the full implications of this proposal are considered, there appears to be the possibility of abuse.

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