

Workplace Safety & Health Program: Activities Are Responsive and Preventative, Using Data-Driven Approaches Report 12-6

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
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REPORT SUMMARY

Why a JLARC Study of Washington's Occupational Safety and Health Program?

In the 2011-13 Operating Budget (2ESHB 1087), the Legislature directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to review the state's occupational safety and health program.

The intended result of government occupational safety and health programs is for employees to have safe and healthy workplaces, for example, by having appropriate protective equipment and using practices that help prevent accidents.

Federal Law Allows States to Administer Their Own Programs

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970 establishes minimum occupational safety and health standards. The federal legislation gives states the option of having their own occupational safety and health programs.

Washington Administers Its Own Occupational Safety and Health Program

Washington is one of 25 states and two territories that administer their own occupational safety and health programs. Our state's standards are embodied in the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) of 1973.

WISHA assigns the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) primary responsibility for overseeing occupational safety and health. The Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) within L&I administers WISHA. As the administrator, DOSH carries out this responsibility by conducting inspections and free consultations, and by offering other compliance assistance resources to employers and employees.

JLARC's Review of L&I's Occupational Safety and Health Activities Resulted in Six Key Findings

This study reviewed L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) inspection and consultation processes, in addition to the other compliance assistance resources DOSH and L&I offer to employers and employees. The focus of these activities is to help prevent injuries and illnesses. During the course of our review, we identified six key findings:

- 1. Employers and employees have specific responsibilities for ensuring safe and healthy workplaces.**
- 2. L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) is in compliance with state and federal law.**
- 3. DOSH allocates resources for data-driven prevention activities.**
- 4. DOSH communicates with employers and employees in a variety of ways and is working to make additional communication improvements.**
- 5. Peer-reviewed research found a reduction in injury and illness claims with businesses that received a DOSH inspection or consultation.**
- 6. Comparing Washington's program and injury and illness rates to other states is difficult and can lead to erroneous performance conclusions.**

The study does not have recommendations.