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OSHA's Ergonomics Standards: Short Summary and Status

On Friday, March 4, 1999, Charles Jeffress, assistant secretary for occupational safety and health at the U.S. Department of labor, held a press conference to release the draft of an ergonomics standard. The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) has had this rule under consideration for at least five years. The stated purpose of the proposed standard is to reduce the number and severity of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) experience by employees. Under the standard, employers would be responsible for taking measures to reduce work-related carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and back strains, etc.

The proposed standard would affect virtually all employers, except those in maritime, construction, or agriculture, with an emphasis on manufacturing and firms involved in "manual handling," including 5.5 million small entities. Of these, 1.45 million would be required to initiate and maintain a basic ergonomics program in their business at all times.

Because the standard would affect so many small employers and firms, OSHA convened a Small Business Regulatory Review Panel as required by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Act (SBREFA).

Twenty small entity representatives were chosen to advise the panel and provide input into the draft standard. The group included 13 owner/operators recommended the Office of Advocacy to represent the interest of the many small businesses concerned about the potential impact of this rule.

The objective of the panel process, under SBREFA is to ensure that a regulatory proposal can meet its objective without having an unnecessary, negative impact on small businesses.

The panel completed its [Report](#) on April 30, 1999.

On July 2, 1999, OSHA reviewed its draft ergonomics standard and submitted it to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for its 90-day review. OSHA published the [proposed ergonomics rule](#) in the *Federal Register* for public comment on Tuesday, November 23, 1999. The comment period closed 3/2/00. OSHA has received close to 7,000 comments on the proposal. OSHA will have additional public hearings on this proposal beginning on March 13th in Washington, DC. The hearings will later move to Chicago and Portland before concluding in DC on Mary 12, 2000. Check www.osha.gov for the hearing witness list and additional information.

On March 20, 2001, President Bush signed into law S.J. Res. 6, a measure repealing the ergonomics proposed rule.



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