

Tuesday, May 10, 2005

INSPECTIONS, FINES NO CURE FOR WORKPLACE DANGERS, ENZI SAYS, URGING NEW POLICIES TO PROMOTE COOPERATION BETWEEN OSHA, BUSINESSES OF ALL SIZES

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today said workplace inspections and fines are not the solution to ensure a safer environment for the nation's workforce, maintaining that federal policies should promote mutual assistance, guidance and support between employers and OSHA.

“Our primary responsibility is to insure a safer and more healthful workplace. We cannot simply inspect or fine our way to safety,” Enzi said Tuesday, during a hearing of the HELP Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety. “We need policies and practices that encourage voluntary compliance, foster better understanding of safety issues and increase cooperation between OSHA and the employer community, particularly where small businesses are concerned.”

During today's hearing, which focused on legislative solutions to lighten the regulatory load on small business, Enzi maintained that the overwhelming majority of employers are committed to ensuring the health and safety of their employees and need more help from OSHA— not more headaches.

“We need a system that encourages employers who work in good faith to protect employees to find out how to achieve safety voluntarily. All government regulations – no matter how necessary or useful – impose a burden on the businesses that are regulated. Unfortunately, that burden falls disproportionately on small firms,” he added.

He emphasized that too often, small employers are left on their own to try to understand and comply with complicated OSHA regulations. However, procedural changes in regulations and industry/OSHA training exchanges may be ways not only to lessen those burdens, but to actually improve workplace safety.

“Complying with workplace regulations is hard enough for large employers who have an in-house staff of safety experts. But for small employers whose safety expert is also the human resources manager, accountant, and systems administrator, the task is nearly impossible,” Enzi said.

He pledged to continue to support, sponsor, and advance proposals that use practical approaches to secure safer and healthier workplaces. Toward that goal, Enzi said will introduce an updated version of the bill offered during the 108th Congress as S.2719, the SAFE Act, or the “Safety Advancement for Employees (SAFE) Act.”

That bill would have allowed OSHA to effectively target the few bad actors who willfully place their employees at risk and also includes provisions to improve hazard

communication and reduce injuries and illnesses caused by the presence of hazardous chemicals in the workplace.

Enzi praised the commitment of Congressman Charlie Norwood (R-GA), who testified at the hearing, to provide relief for small businesses struggling to comply federal workplace regulations. “I appreciate the high priority Congressman Norwood has placed on regulatory reform and look forward to work with him as well as this Subcommittee’s Chairman, Senator Johnny Isaakson (R-GA), during this Congress,” Enzi said.