



Regulatory Compliance

Ask an Expert: NIOSH vs. OSHA

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What You Need to Know

Both NIOSH and OSHA were established by a government act in 1970.
They work together to regulate different parts of workplace safety.
NIOSH is a watchdog; OSHA makes standards.

MSC Industrial Supply Safety Specialist Shelly Baize explains how 2 crucial organizations ensure the health and safety of all workers.

Both the *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health* (NIOSH) and the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration* (OSHA) play important roles in ensuring safety in the workplace. Since their establishment by the *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970*, NIOSH and OSHA continue to improve working conditions throughout the U.S.



Shelly Baize

Each organization plays an important role in ensuring the day-to-day health and safety of workers, but each has distinct purposes and goals. Understanding the unique responsibilities of both NIOSH and OSHA can help safety coordinators know which organization is best suited to address a particular issue—and help workers get the support they need and deserve.

Shelly Baize, a safety specialist with MSC Industrial Supply, shares her expert knowledge on how NIOSH and OSHA differ, and how they work hand in hand.

How are NIOSH and OSHA different?

Baize: The simplest way to put it is that NIOSH is more research-centered and focused on health, while OSHA is a regulatory committee that enforces safety. NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, meaning it looks a lot at chronic on-the-job health issues.

How do they work together or complement one another?

Baize: NIOSH is basically a watchdog for worker health and safety. It determines what's hurting workers in the workplace—everything from respiratory diseases to exposure to chemicals. Once they've determined what needs to change, they then work hand in hand with OSHA, which determines whether to adopt new standards. For instance, if all of a sudden a lot of people are getting sick in a shipyard, NIOSH will go in, evaluate the employees, get them tested and then make recommendations on how to remedy the situation. Workers have historically been exposed to asbestos in shipyards, and NIOSH may look at past examples in its research. Next, OSHA will go in, look at the new regulations and meet with the powers that be about how to implement new rules.

What are some ways NIOSH determines whether workplaces are meeting standards?

Baize: Primarily through all sorts of research. It may investigate workplaces and gather testimony from employers and employees, or require employers to measure and report employee exposure to potentially hazardous materials. In extreme circumstances, where workers are being exposed to toxic chemicals or working in physically harmful situations, an emergency standard can be put in place to protect them.

Which organization would be in charge if, for instance, construction workers complained about hazardous fumes on the job?

Baize: That would be NIOSH. It often does research projects on construction issues, looking into everything from the causes of falls to electrical and health hazards such as asphalt fumes, silica, welding fumes and extreme noise. Then it tries to find solutions and recommends changes to the worksite.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

What questions do you have about NIOSH and OSHA for your workplace?

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