

## **A Challenge to Excellence**

by Judith Weinberg

*"Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises."* Demosthenes

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has learned many lessons about protecting the safety and health of America's workers. One is that government can require minimum levels of protection, but it cannot require excellence. Companies that pursue safety and health excellence do so voluntarily. They operate in every industry and range from small, family-owned businesses to large, multinational corporations.

These businesses often are among the most profitable in their industries and communities, and their safety and health performance can be an important factor in overall success. When injuries, illnesses and fatalities decline, employees and their families obviously benefit, but so does the bottom line. Dollar savings can be dramatic, including substantial reductions in workers' compensation expenses.

There is general agreement among safety and health experts – both inside government and throughout industry – that the best way to achieve excellence in worker protection is by implementing an effective safety and health management system. The companies that participate in OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP), the most prestigious safety and health recognition program in the U.S., are testaments to the benefits of this approach. Many companies, however, lack the resources or expertise to pursue this path to excellence.

**OSHA Challenge** offers businesses and public sector organizations an opportunity to develop or improve their safety and health management system in a non-threatening, proactive manner. A step-by-step roadmap, based on the successful VPP model, guides Participants through Challenge's three stages. Each stage features clearly defined actions, documentation, and outcomes. OSHA provides stage requirements and online tracking tools that enable Participants to move at their own pace and develop safety and health systems tailored to their unique workplace conditions and needs.

Participants work with a **Challenge Administrator**, who provides guidance and serves as the primary contact between the Participant and OSHA. Administrators also perform the essential function of collecting and reporting information, such as stage progress and injury/illness data.

**Recognition.** Participants receive recognition from OSHA for successfully completing each stage – for example, their names posted on OSHA's website and their achievements cited during OSHA presentations around the country. Program graduates are encouraged to apply for VPP, which requires minimal additional effort.

**Eligibility.** OSHA Challenge is open to employers who need help developing and implementing their safety and health management systems. OSHA is particularly interested in attracting employers who want to qualify for VPP. However, a commitment to VPP is not required to enjoy the benefits of Challenge.

**Getting Started.** For more information about OSHA Challenge, contact one of the Challenge Administrators listed on OSHA's website: [www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/challenge.html](http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/challenge.html). Or place a call to OSHA's Office of Partnership and Recognition, 202-693-2213.

**OSHA also is seeking new Challenge Administrators.** If you think you might want to serve in this valued capacity, providing guidance to businesses in your industry or individual facilities within your organization, give OSHA a call. Challenge Administrators may be corporations, nonprofit associations, and federal agencies. They may not be private safety and health consultants or for-profit associations. Requirements include demonstrated knowledge and experience in safety and health management systems, availability of adequate resources, and a commitment to Challenge. OSHA will review potential Administrators' qualifications and make a decision.

**OSHA Challenge could be your roadmap to safety and health excellence.  
What are you waiting for?**

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