

OSHA increases enforcement against serious safety and health violators

From October 2009 to September 2010, OSHA issued citations in 164 significant cases where penalties reached \$100,000 or more. OSHA found conditions warranting use of its egregious citation policy in 20 of these inspections. In a so-called egregious case, an employer is cited on a per-instance basis under the same standard rather than grouping similar violations for penalty purposes. The result is a considerably higher penalty intended to serve as a deterrent. Egregious treatment is often used when an employer exhibits deliberately violative conduct or indifference to employee safety and health or the law. Many of these cases spring from inspections of tragic worker fatalities, worksite catastrophes (such as explosions or chemical releases) or worker injuries or illnesses. This number of significant and egregious cases is more than OSHA issued during any similar period in the last decade. Egregious cases during this period include the [BP Products North America](#) oil refinery in Texas City, Texas; the [Kleen Energy](#) power plant in Middletown, Conn.; and the [Cooperative Plus](#) grain handling facility in Burlington, Wis.

The increase in significant and egregious cases demonstrates OSHA's commitment to aggressively enforcing its standards when employers show indifference to protecting the safety, health and lives of their workers. The increase results from better inspection targeting, more follow-up inspections and the addition of more compliance officers. In addition, inspectors are issuing a higher percentage of citations for violations that seriously endanger workers or show an employer's willful disregard for their safety. Also, many referrals to other facilities within the same company lead to more significant cases, such as the serious electrical and other hazards found at many [U.S. Postal Service facilities](#) across the country.