

Workplace Safety Advocates Fear Effect of New Budget Deal

In early August 2011, Congress passed a budget which raised the national debt ceiling. The deal also aimed to cut the national deficit by \$2.1 trillion dollars over the next 10 years. The budget included \$917 billion in spending cuts over the next decade, \$21 billion of which would be in the 2012 budget. As part of the agreement, Congress will establish a committee of six Republicans and six Democrats to propose and additional \$1.5 trillion in budget cuts by Thanksgiving. Congress will then vote the plan up or down, with no opportunity for amendments. Many workplace safety advocates fear that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration will take a disproportionately large share of the spending cuts and that could translate in to more people injured at work.

OSHA is the federal agency responsible for implementing and enforcing regulations to create safe workplaces and prevent employee injuries and illness through a combination of training, education and inspections. During budget negotiations that took place leading up to Congress passing the budget deal, Republican Sen. Tom Coburn, one of the key negotiators of the new budget, released a plan that included a \$72.6 million to OSHA's current \$558.6 million annual budget – a cut of almost 15 percent.

Many fear that if OSHA's budget takes such draconian cuts as Sen. Coburn suggested, OSHA will be even less able to carry out its mission than it currently is. OSHA's present budget allows it 2,218 inspectors at both the federal and state levels to inspect the 7.3 million workplaces in the U.S. with over 135 million employees. This means that there is one inspector for every 57,984 workers. Federal OSHA agents could

only inspect every workplace once every 129 years and state OSHA agents could inspect each workplace once every 67 years. Workplace safety experts argue that for a workforce as large as the one in the U.S., OSHA would need at least 12,000 agents to carry out its responsibilities properly.

A serious reduction in funding to OSHA would affect its operations across the board, OSHA officials argue, resulting in less educational outreach to employers to train them in creating safe places and fewer inspections of workplaces. They believe such a combination has a high likelihood of resulting in many more workplace injuries and fatalities. The nation's productivity could decline as more workers are out of the workforce due to injury.

Cuts to OSHA budget will likely result in unsafe working conditions. Unsafe working conditions lead to injuries. If you have suffered an injury at work, do not hesitate to contact an experienced workers' compensation attorney who can discuss your situation with you and advise you of your options.