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AUG. 9 1977

OSHA's Impact Escapes Public Eye

THE Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) has been in effect for six years now to protect the safety and health of American workers. How is it doing?

Employers are expected to comply with more than 800 pages of OSHA regulations in the Federal Register, and OSHA has more than 1,400 compliance officers to see that they do so. Cost of OSHA has run into billions of dollars for taxpayers and several times as much for businesses and industries.

With all of this, workers should be much safer and jobs more secure. Are they?

Because of OSHA's widespread lack of popularity among businessmen, studies are being made to find out. One made by the American Conservative Union, titled "OSHA: An Overview," says the agency has had no significant impact on worker safety and health whatsoever.

"In fact, since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began recording

OSHA's performance in 1972, the number of work days lost due to injuries, per 100 workers, has increased 15 per cent, the booklet states.

Such allegations disturb OSHA officials, whose empire of some 2,200 employees could be wiped out or reduced severely by laws pending in Congress. One is by Sen. Dewey F. Bartlett, R-Okla.

The new administrator, Eula Bingham, an environmental health professor, has been lashing out in many directions since she took charge of OSHA, trying to put down criticism. OSHA is trying to start its own studies to prove that it does have value.

Bingham has stated in interviews that she will root out trivial safety standards, that she will crack down on serious hazards, that she will encourage better understanding with small business and that she will give top priority to job-related health problems.

OSHA has been ridiculed for such things as its silly farm safety book (which it withdrew) and criticized for its needlessly detailed and too numerous regulations.

An Idaho court has ruled that OSHA is not superior to the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects citizens against unreasonable searches and seizures.

OSHA must obtain warrants before inspecting businesses, just as other enforcement agencies must do.

Of course, OSHA is just one of scores of federal agencies created to oversee the lives of Americans, but it has been called "bureaucracy at its meddlesome worst." Citizens quite properly may wonder if it justifies its cost.

The American Consumers Union booklet says OSHA can't offer proof that the job injury rate would be much different if the agency had never been created in the first place.