

For Immediate Release

Contact: Dan Shipp  
703-525-1695  
dshipp@safetysafetyequipment.org

## **ISEA Challenges OSHA Standards Proposal; Offers Alternative To Protect Workers**

Arlington, Va. (July 17, 2007) – The International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) has challenged a U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) proposed rule to regulate the use of safety eyewear and hard hats, and offered an alternative approach that ISEA says would maintain worker protection.

In comments submitted July 16, ISEA said the agency's May 17, 2007, proposal to change the way it recognizes product performance standards for personal protective equipment (PPE) could potentially reduce the level of protection for workers and make compliance with the rule more difficult for employers.

Current OSHA regulations require that eye and head protection devices meet product performance standards issued under the banner of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). ANSI standards are voluntary, but they are widely accepted in the United States and recognized by OSHA and numerous other regulatory agencies.

OSHA adopts specific product performance standards, and the standards may go through several revisions before OSHA is able to update its rules to incorporate the newer versions. Under the OSHA proposal, however, references to these standards would be replaced with a requirement that PPE meet "good design standards," an approach that ISEA says offers no assurance of a minimum level of protection.

ISEA's alternative would maintain the reference to the current version of the standard, and include a method by which OSHA could evaluate standards that offer equivalent protection and allow employers to use products meeting those standards.

This approach "maintains the level of performance of PPE that meets the consensus standard in the current regulation, so that worker protection is not compromised," according to the ISEA submission. It gives employers the flexibility to select PPE that best meets their workers' needs, based on hazard assessment. And it gives OSHA the flexibility to update references to consensus standards when they are revised, and add new product standards as they are issued without a lengthy and laborious regulatory process.

(more)

“We fully appreciate what OSHA is trying to do in this rulemaking,” said ISEA President Dan Shipp. “They aren’t able to keep up with revisions to the product standards they reference in their regulations, and they’re searching for a way to keep the rules current without having to go through a full rulemaking every few years for each standard.

“But to take those references out of the regulation, and replace them with the requirement that PPE comply with some vaguely defined good design standard shows a lack of understanding of the role of performance standards and their use in regulation.”

In its comments, ISEA points out that there are hundreds of PPE product standards around the world that might qualify as good design standards, but that they are not equivalent to the ANSI standards that have been part of the regulation. Without the reference to a specific standard in the regulatory text, OSHA would provide no baseline performance requirements for PPE, ISEA said.

“If the rule is published the way OSHA is proposing it, the ANSI standards would still be the baseline, and OSHA would include them in an appendix as examples of what makes a good design standard,” Shipp said. “But what happens in the future?”

The proposed requirements for a good design standard are that it incorporate safety, that it is recognized as providing an adequate level of protection, and that the standards-developing organization use an open process that considers the views of a broad constituency.

“There’s nothing in this proposal that says the standards recognized in the future have to be as protective as standards recognized today,” Shipp said. “That’s why we’re trying to convince OSHA not to take the reference to a specific standard out of the regulatory text.”

ISEA asked OSHA to convene an informal public hearing to discuss all the aspects of this proposed rule. For a copy of the ISEA comments, go to [www.safetyequipment.org](http://www.safetyequipment.org).

ISEA, headquartered in Arlington, Va., is the trade association for personal protective equipment. Its member companies are world leaders in the design and manufacture of PPE used to protect people from hazardous environments in the workplace and at home.