

**Remarks As Prepared For Delivery By
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**VOLUNTARY PROTECTION PROGRAMS PARTICIPANTS' ASSOCIATION
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Thank you for welcoming me here today. I want to begin by conveying U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis' best wishes and gratitude for the commitment to excellence exhibited by every VPP participant.

I am personally grateful for the group of VPPPA representatives who visited me in Washington, D.C. in July - including the members of the VPPPA board who were among them and particularly National Board of Directors Chairman Dave Jackson and Executive Director Davis Layne. I thought our exchange was enlightening and beneficial, and I'm eager to discuss with you the thoughts that I shared with the representatives.

I'm also grateful to all the other VPP participants whom I've met since coming to OSHA in April who have expressed, with admirable and impressive enthusiasm, the benefits they have gained from VPP.

It's good to be here in San Antonio to meet with this cross-section of America's workforce. The annual VPPPA conference brings together hourly workers, safety and health professionals, and public and private sector workers - all true believers in workplace safety and health, and all gathered here to exchange ideas and to share their enthusiasm for worker protection.

It's exhilarating and heartwarming to be here in the middle of so much positive energy.

OSHA's goals and focus

There's also great energy in OSHA these days as we look forward to positive changes in the Agency. We're looking forward to leadership under newly nominated Assistant Secretary David Michaels, whom we look forward to being confirmed by the Senate - hopefully, early this fall.

In the meantime, last April, Secretary Solis asked me to come aboard and immediately take steps to carry out her agenda in OSHA, which is a renewed focus on enforcement and standards. We're returning to OSHA's original mission, as stipulated in the OSH Act, to assure safe workplaces for American workers and to ensure that employers comply with the law and safe working conditions.

Although we wish everyone were as committed to workplace safety and health as VPPPA members, this is unfortunately not the case. For that reason, this Administration will turn its focus to those worst offenders who continue to needlessly put workers' lives in jeopardy.

New frontiers

This Administration is taking a number of actions to accomplish this goal.

OSHA is hiring around 130 new inspectors in FY 2010. We have also added inspectors this year to ensure that work funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is done safely.

OSHA is launching a new Severe Violator Enforcement Program to improve our targeted inspections. This is a revitalization of our former Enhanced Enforcement Program.

We're taking swift action when we see problems. We just finished a construction sweep in

several cities in Texas in response to a growing number of fatalities that has unfortunately made Texas the Nation's leader in workplace fatalities. We will be launching a number of similar initiatives in coming years as troubling trends indicate a problem.

We're seeking ways to raise penalties and make them a real disincentive to cutting corners on safety.

We're accelerating those standards that have been languishing in the pipeline - such as silica, cranes and derricks, and the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals.

Secretary Solis has announced a new standard to address the hazards of combustible dust and we'll be announcing other new standards for hazardous situations where no standards exist.

We'll be looking at how we can streamline the rulemaking process to issue smarter, more protective standards in a faster timeframe.

We'll also be launching a number of new National Emphasis Programs (NEP). We are just finishing up an NEP on refineries and have just launched an NEP focusing on chemical plants.

And we will soon announce our new Recordkeeping National Emphasis Program in response to studies and Congressional hearings that have cast serious doubt on the accuracy of statistical reports on injuries and illnesses.

You may also be interested to know that, as part of this recordkeeping NEP, we will be taking a very close look at incentives, discipline and other programs that, while seeking to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses, produce unwelcome consequences. The current VPP directive warns about the potential impact of these programs on the accuracy of reporting. As we examine recordkeeping practices, we will also be looking at how these programs can discourage workers from reporting injuries and illnesses.

OSHA has nothing against incentive programs as long as they encourage the right things and don't discourage reporting. For example, there's nothing wrong with providing incentives for reporting close calls, for taking a health and safety training course or for developing a training curriculum - as long as these incentives don't discourage workers from raising health and safety problems or reporting injuries and illnesses.

Finally, in addition to these enforcement initiatives, we continue to recognize the vital importance of compliance assistance to support more aggressive enforcement and standard-setting. My goal is to have no business in this country - large or small - that will be able to legitimately argue that it couldn't find the information it needed to comply with OSHA standards and make its workplace safe.

VPP today

But enough about us; let's talk about you.

In addition to enforcement, OSHA needs to make full use of other tools. Not only hammers are needed to do a good job. This is why cooperative programs, including VPP, deserve a place in the OSHA toolbox.

I was pleased to join Secretary Solis in June when we spoke at the ASSE annual conference here in San Antonio and toured a nearby VPP site. The H.E.B. Print/Mail Services facility achieved VPP Star status in February, and it was great to see first-hand how workers and management have integrated the values of workplace safety and health into their daily operations. Their ergonomics program was just one impressive example that we observed, illustrating how VPP members can and do exceed OSHA standards.

As I've met with the VPPPA board and many of your members over the past several months, I've been extremely impressed with your dedication to workplace safety, with the way you have implemented health and safety programs, and with the obvious pride that you show in your health and safety achievements.

The concept of continuous and comprehensive improvement in worker safety and health is something everyone in DOL believes in.

I particularly appreciate the invaluable service of Special Government Employees, not just as ambassadors for VPP, but for the time they spend making these programs work.

Companies that excel in this way deserve recognition and we are committed to ensuring that those companies that excel in workplace safety and health continue to receive this recognition.

But, we're all aware that VPP is facing a number of challenges in the near future, and I gladly accepted your invitation to speak before you today so that, together, we can chart a course that will preserve the best of VPP while addressing the challenges.

First, as I described, Secretary Solis and this Administration is committed to putting more emphasis and more resources into enforcement. In accordance with those goals, the President has asked for a significant increase in OSHA's budget for FY 2010, and almost all of that increase will be dedicated to restoring our enforcement and standard-setting capacity to FY 2001 levels.

We know that this country is in a difficult economic situation, and this has challenged government in many ways. Certainly we can't look forward to significant funding increases in coming years; the "pie" in the budget chart is not going to get bigger. So, as we move forward in deciding how to meet OSHA's new goals and priorities, we need to make difficult decisions, and we will need your help to identify what is best about VPP and how we can maintain and improve on those features.

Second, I think you're all aware of the two Government Accountability Office reports related to VPP. In 2004, the GAO issued a report calling on OSHA to evaluate the effectiveness of our cooperative programs before expanding them significantly. While the programs grew, the evaluation was never done. Most recently, on May 20, the GAO issued a report that found serious problems in OSHA's oversight of the programs and consistency problems between OSHA regions.

GAO made three key recommendations to OSHA:

1. Develop a documentation policy for information on actions taken by OSHA's regions in response to fatalities and serious injuries at VPP sites.
2. Establish internal controls that ensure consistent compliance by the Agency's regions with VPP policies.
3. Develop goals and performance measures for the VPP.

OSHA has issued a new guidance addressing many of these recommendations. In particular, to address questions of consistent compliance with VPP policies, we will be reviewing the Modified Application Process (MAP) and other processes that deviate from our VPP Policies and Procedures Manual.

We are putting together an action plan for both the national and field offices to address GAO's recommendations and to look at the bigger picture. With the involvement and support of our stakeholders, we will consider how our cooperative programs should fit into OSHA's overall goals and budget. Our aim is to strike a proper balance with cooperative programs and our current - and necessary - emphasis on standards and enforcement.

In response to questions posed by the GAO, Congress and other stakeholders, we are also taking

a fresh look at VPP participant exemptions from National Emphasis Program inspections, as well as General Schedule inspections. And, although VPP members are not currently part of the Recordkeeping NEP, we are planning to develop ways to include VPP members in OSHA's focus on accurate recordkeeping.

I will be interested in hearing your reaction to these changes. So far, however, I'm happy to report that in the months I have been here, I have received a positive response as I've raised these issues with your Board members. For example, I have asked every VPP member whom I've met, "What do you like most about the program-" and "What do you and your employees get out of it-" They have responded with inspiring stories about the improvement in their safety and health programs and the pride their employees take in the program. *Not one* has mentioned the inspection exemptions as a major benefit of being a VPP member.

So, as you can see, OSHA and the VPP community face serious *challenges* and *changes* ahead of us. A new policy focus, increased oversight and resource restrictions present challenges that this program has never had to face before now; but, I'm convinced that, working with all OSHA stakeholders, we can chart a course forward together.

Now, I want to take a few moments to address another important issue...

When I met with VPPPA representatives last month, we discussed certain issues that concern our interactions with prospective and active VPP participants. These issues involve ethical behavior, and I wanted to share these concerns with you.

From President Obama on down, this Administration is putting increased emphasis on strict compliance with ethics requirements. To preserve the integrity of the VPP evaluation process, we need to make certain that all parties understand that federal employees are subject to stringent ethics requirements.

During on-site visits, including ceremonies, it is critical that members of the OSHA teams are not offered gifts that could appear to unduly influence them in making objective decisions about the facility being evaluated. Equally important, members of OSHA teams may not solicit special treatment from VPP candidates and participants, including (but not limited to) on-site meals.

As a reminder, ethics requirements were recently sent out to every OSHA employee, and they were encouraged to contact our ethics attorney's office whenever they have a question.

Everyone's cooperation on this matter will help ensure that VPP retains its high standard for unquestionable quality and merit.

OSHA Challenge

I also want to spend some time telling you how much we value one other tool in OSHA's toolbox which can help worksites improve their Safety and Health Management Systems and measure results: the OSHA Challenge program.

Let me give you an example of the success of this program, which currently has 274 participants.

The United States Air Force and OSHA formed a partnership to help the Air Force with its quest to achieve VPP status at all its bases around the world. The steering committee chose OSHA Challenge to guide the Air Force through the VPP process.

In 2005, Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma, with consistently high injury and illness rates, was identified as one of the Department of Defense's top 10 hazardous worksites. According to Lt. Col. Wade Weisman, a member of the Air Force Partnership Management team, this unwelcome distinction was turned around through VPP preparation. As a result of the leadership of the base's management, employee involvement, and the use of the OSHA Challenge Tool, Altus Air

Force Base saw a dramatic decrease in lost workdays over the next two years - a reduction of 94 percent.

The base achieved this remarkable drop in lost days and improved productivity in a number of ways. The employees suggested new work practices, including redesigned storage racks and safer work platforms. These innovations reduced many sprains and strains as well as fall hazards. These changes also lowered costs and improved productivity by reducing aircraft damage. In fact, the results of the improved work platforms, developed through the VPP process, proved so successful that the Air Force plans to fabricate them at other bases around the country. Not only that, but the Royal Australian Air Force on the other side of the planet heard about this innovation and intends to build similar units for maintaining its aircraft.

Fewer lost work days, safer tasks, reduced equipment damage, greater productivity, a national and international model, *and* our working men and women get to stay safe and healthy: This is what OSHA Challenge and VPP are all about.

I know that there are more success stories like this all across our Nation. I hope you will share your stories and best practices here at this conference, with others back home, and with OSHA.

Pandemic Flu Preparedness

We have another, very timely example of how protecting workers need not be a divisive "labor vs. management" issue but, rather, a shared challenge that benefits everyone. If there was ever a time to come together and practice prevention at work, now is the time.

This isn't a VPP issue, but it's so critical to workplace safety and health that I want to take just a moment today at this conference to alert you to the problem - and to call on everyone here for your help.

In late April, a new strain of influenza surfaced in the United States, Mexico, and around the globe. Fortunately, the virus was weaker than we feared. However, scientists believe that this H1N1 virus is likely to return this fall and could cause more severe illness.

A worldwide outbreak of a severe strain of influenza could disrupt our economy and our society for weeks and quite possibly many months. In a worst-case situation, employers in affected regions of our country could face as much as 40 percent absenteeism in their workforce.

So, to minimize the impact of a pandemic, employers and workers must come together and develop, test, and implement a comprehensive plan to prepare workplaces and protect themselves.

Two years ago, OSHA published two major guidance documents to help employers protect exposed workers and preserve the continuity of business. Recently, OSHA issued a number of new fact sheets, QuickCards, and guidance documents on Pan Flu preparedness. We have established a Web page with links to these and other resources. Very soon we'll post on this Web page a new self-training eTool.

So, when you return to your worksites, I urge you to do everything you can to ensure, as soon as possible, that management and workers are working together to prepare for a possible pandemic.

SGE of the Year Award

We've come to a special point in today's program. I'm pleased to honor one of you with the National VPP Special Government Employee of the Year Award.

The award recognizes a Special Government Employee "who epitomizes and exhibits exceptional support, effort, and action in VPP, and in so doing sets him or her apart from other SGEs." The

person selected must: be actively involved in volunteer activities that benefit VPP; perform outreach and assistance to employers and workers outside their own company; and have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to the partnership ideals of VPP.

Ten worthy SGEs have been nominated for this annual honor. As I announce the names of the nominees for the Fifth Annual SGE of the Year Award, would you please join me on stage?

Region 1: **Daniel Montanaro**, General Electric
Region 2: **Marianne Krawiec**, Infineum
Region 3: **Cindy Estes**, General Electric
Region 4: **Allen Cook**, United Space Alliance
Region 5: **Jack Burton**, General Electric
Region 6: **Jerry Hale**, Chevron Phillips
Region 7: **Robert Sander**, U.S. Postal Service
Region 8: **Anthony Stoner**, Integrity Windows and Doors
Region 9: **Robert Hafner**, Rohm & Haas
Region 10: **Jeffrey Carlson**, ConocoPhillips

Congratulations on your achievement and commitment to employee safety and health. Every one of you is a champion - a true VPP Star! Let's give this year's nominees a big round of applause.

One of these stars has been selected for special recognition, and it's my pleasure and honor to announce the winner of the 5th Annual SGE of the Year Award. Please join me in recognizing this year's worthy winner - **Robert Sander**.

Congratulations, Bob. Please stay with me as I highlight a few of your distinguished accomplishments. Your nomination states that you have -

Participated on four VPP on-site evaluations in 2008;

Mentored five potential VPP applicants in 2008;

Served as co-instructor for the SGE training course at Monsanto World Headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri;

Conducted a workshop at Region VII's VPPPA regional conference on "Becoming an SGE;"

Participated as a member of the VPPPA Mentoring Committee;

Served as Chairperson of the St. Louis Federal Safety and Health Council since 1994; and in 2008, due to Bob's outstanding leadership, the Council received a Superior Performance Award from the OSHA Regional Administrator;

Demonstrated excellent leadership skills and technical expertise in a range of essential hazard and worker protection issues, including machine guarding, lockout/tagout, walking/working surfaces, fire protection and life safety code;

And Bob showed true team spirit and commitment to VPP by stepping in at the last minute to serve on a VPP team when another SGE had to cancel. As you know, these teams put in a lot of work individually and together, so a sudden cancelation of even one member can upset the team's planning and scheduling. Bob made sure this didn't happen.

Bob: On behalf of OSHA and the federal government, thank you and congratulations.

Charge to VPPPA members

Thank you once again for welcoming me to your conference. It feels great to spend time with "the best of the best" and those who aspire to this level of excellence.

Thanks again to the leadership of the VPPPA National Board for caring so passionately about worker safety and health. I want everyone here to return home after this conference with the clear understanding that OSHA recognizes the value of VPP and its enthusiastic participants. Also understand that OSHA is obliged to focus much of its attention and resources at this time on the bad players - the irresponsible employers who recklessly endanger the lives of their workers.

I know that this conference will keep you all fired up about workplace safety, and that you'll carry that fire back to your communities. As you do, I hope you will also -

Get more involved with the rulemaking process. We are dedicated to having OSHA standards that protect workers, but also standards that make sense. When we make a proposal, tell us what works and what doesn't. Send us comments. Participate in hearings. Don't shrink back and delegate that responsibility to your industry associations.

Speak out more in the general public about the value of prevention and worker safety and health. Give public talks and write articles. All too often we hear from some employers and politicians that "Hey, construction work or factory work is inherently dangerous. Stuff happens." Well, you are the ones who know that's not true. Even dangerous work can be done safely. Successful companies don't thrive in spite of a strong health and safety program; they thrive because of such programs - and you're the ones that can tell that story to the world.

Please continue to mentor other companies and inspire business and trade school students. Be a model and a force for a change in thinking about how workplaces function in your own communities. In particular, encourage your employers to mentor others by becoming OSHA Challenge Administrators.

Continue to share your best practices with other VPPPA members, your industries, and with OSHA. You're not competing with each other, only with preventable catastrophes.

Support the SGE program. Serving as a Special Government Employee encourages everyone to learn, and the lessons you bring back will improve your own worksites as well.

Finally, continue to take pride in your accomplishments. As VPP participants, you're models for your industries, trailblazers with your innovative approaches, and heroes for saving lives on the job every day.

It's been a real pleasure to be here with you today. I'm looking forward to working with VPPPA and all OSHA stakeholders to address the challenges that we're facing, but I'm convinced that, together, we can meet these challenges and chart a course that will preserve what's best about the VPP and what's best for American workers.

Thank you.