

OSHA 2026 Enforcement Priority Scorecard

A year-end guide for safety, HR, and operations leaders

In 2026, OSHA's focus has been less on major new standards and more on enforcing current requirements. Employers should prioritize existing compliance obligations while continuing to monitor proposed rules that are not yet final.



Hazard Communication

Status: Final rule and enforceable

Priority: HIGH

Key Employer Deadline: November 20, 2026

The revised [Hazard Communication requirements](#) are the most significant new General Industry compliance change of 2026.

What OSHA may review:

- Written Hazard Communication program
- Chemical inventory
- Safety Data Sheets (SDS)
- Primary and secondary container labels
- Employee knowledge and training
- Procedures for non-routine tasks
- Coordination at multi-employer workplaces

Leadership Action: Confirm who owns the process and address any gaps in the written program, chemical inventories, labels, SDSs, or training before the November deadline.



Heat Illness Prevention

Status: Active enforcement program

Priority: VERY HIGH

The federal heat standard is not final, but OSHA increased its heat enforcement focus through the revised [Heat National Emphasis Program](#), effective April 10, 2026.

What OSHA may review:

- Cool drinking water
- Rest periods
- Shade or climate-controlled recovery areas
- Acclimatization
- Heat illness training
- Employee monitoring
- Environmental heat evaluations
- Emergency response procedures
- Controls for indoor process heat

Leadership Action: Make sure applicable locations have a documented, site-specific heat illness prevention program and that employees and supervisors understand how it works.



Warehousing and Distribution

Status: Active enforcement program

Priority: VERY HIGH

OSHA's revised [National Emphasis Program](#), effective July 31, 2026, allows for comprehensive inspections of targeted warehouse and distribution operations.

What OSHA may review:

- Powered industrial trucks
- Material handling and storage
- Walking-working surfaces
- Slips, trips, and falls
- Means of egress and emergency exits
- Fire prevention and protection
- Heat hazards
- Ergonomic hazards

Leadership Action: Conduct a cross-functional audit and make sure corrective actions have clear owners and target completion dates.



Occupational Noise

Status: Active in selected regions

Priority: HIGH in targeted manufacturing areas

The [requirements](#) have not materially changed, but several [OSHA regions](#) have renewed or revised enforcement programs focused on manufacturing noise.

What OSHA may review:

- Initial noise hazard assessments
- Personal noise dosimetry
- Eight-hour time-weighted average (TWA) calculations
- Engineering and administrative controls
- Hearing conservation enrollment
- Audiometric testing
- Hearing protection
- Employee training
- Recordkeeping

Leadership Action: Confirm that exposure data, controls, hearing conservation activities, and supporting records are current for applicable locations.

Regulatory Developments to Watch

These are still under development and are not new federal compliance requirements for 2026:

- Lockout/Tagout modernization
- Respiratory protection revisions
- Emergency Response Standard
- Fixed ladder requirements
- Crystalline silica medical surveillance changes

Important Note: Employers should continue following current standards unless and until OSHA issues final changes.

Before year-end, ask:

- ✓ Have we assigned an owner to each high-priority compliance area?
- ✓ Have we approved the resources needed to address gaps?
- ✓ Can we quickly access supporting programs and records?
- ✓ Are corrective actions being tracked through completion?