

OSHA Asks CEOs to Prevent Workplace Injuries With Crowd Control

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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The Occupational Health and Safety Administration sent a letter this week to the CEOs of fourteen major retailers urging them to take steps now to prevent customer and worker injuries during Black Friday and other holiday sales events. In 2008, a retail worker was trampled to death by a crowd during a Black Friday sales event, and OSHA says crowd-related injuries and related [workers' compensation claims](#) are on the rise.

"Crowd-related injuries during special retail sales and promotional events have increased during recent years," said OSHA assistant secretary Dr. David Michaels in a news release about the letters. The letter included an OSHA Fact Sheet called "Crowd Management Safety Tips for Retailers."

"Many of these incidents can be prevented by adopting a crowd management plan, and this fact sheet provides retail employers with guidelines for avoiding injuries during the holiday shopping season," said Dr. Michaels.

Retail Workplace Safety During Large Events Begins With Good Planning

OSHA recommends that employers plan ahead to prevent dangerous overcrowding and the customer and worker injuries that can come with it. Risks from overcrowding range from slip and fall accidents or falling merchandise to fires, crowd crushing, and assaults on workers.

The advance plan should include making sure that proper emergency information is at hand, properly training workers, hiring appropriate security and preparing clear signage about store hours, the location of major sale items and where to stand in lines.

Pre-Event Setup Safety Measures

When setting up for the event, OSHA recommends:

- Set up barricades or rope lines, taking care that the line does not start right at the entrance to the store.
- Barricades need to have regular breaks so that customers are not trapped if there is pushing from behind.
- To reduce the incentive for customers to push or jump the line, provide tickets, wrist bands or another entrance process. An online auction of hot items could also prevent unruliness.

- Make sure that obstacles such as shopping carts, as well as any projectiles, are moved out of the way.
- Ensure that merchandise is stably situated so it doesn't fall.
- Be sure to provide safe entrances for people with disabilities.

Preventing Accidents and Injuries During the Event

Communication is key. Designate an employee to update restless customers on how the line will move and when hot items are going to be sold -- or are sold out. Provide crowd control or security at every entrance, including those that are not being used. When the occupancy limit is reached, prevent new customers from entering. Never block off egress from the store.

Detailed information about OSHA-recommended crowd management measures can be found by clicking on the link to the OSHA fact sheet below.

In the 2008 incident where the worker was crushed to death by the crowd, the store was not using a crowd control plan recommended by OSHA. Doing so can prevent customer and [workplace accidents](#), workers' compensation claims, and tragic events that can mar the holiday season.

Sources:

- OSHA Fact Sheet, "[Crowd Management Safety Tips For Retailers](#)"
- OSHA news release, "US Labor Department's OSHA encourages major retailers to provide crowd management measures to protect workers during Black Friday, other sales events," November 3, 2010