



Highlights of [GAO-04-378](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives

## WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH

# OSHA's Voluntary Compliance Strategies Show Promising Results, but Should Be Fully Evaluated before They Are Expanded

### Why GAO Did This Study

Because the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) can inspect only a fraction of 7 million U.S. worksites each year in its efforts to ensure safe and healthy working conditions, the agency has increasingly supplemented enforcement with "voluntary compliance strategies" to reach more employers and employ its resources most effectively. GAO assessed the types of strategies used, the extent of their use, and their effectiveness. GAO also obtained suggestions from specialists for additional voluntary compliance strategies.

### What GAO Recommends

To strengthen OSHA's use of its voluntary compliance strategies, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Labor direct the Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health to (1) identify cost-effective methods of assessing the effectiveness of OSHA's voluntary compliance programs and (2) develop a strategic framework that articulates the priorities and resource allocations for the agency's voluntary compliance programs before further expanding the use of these strategies.

In its written comments on the draft report, OSHA generally agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-378](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-378).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bob Robertson at (202) 512-7215 or [robertsonr@gao.gov](mailto:robertsonr@gao.gov).

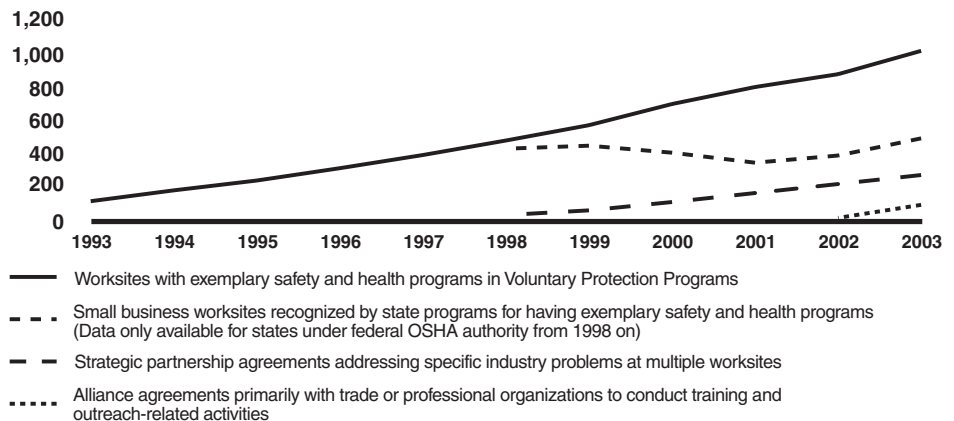
### What GAO Found

OSHA has implemented four voluntary programs, using a mix of strategies, that have extended its reach to a growing number of employers. For example, one program recognizes more than 1,000 worksites with exemplary records and practices while another focuses on hazardous industries, encouraging more than 200 employers to eliminate serious hazards. The agency plans to significantly expand its voluntary compliance programs over the next few years, although such expansion may tax its limited resources.

OSHA's voluntary compliance programs appear to have yielded many positive outcomes, but the agency does not yet have adequate data to assess their individual and relative effectiveness. Employers and employees at nine worksites we visited attested to reductions in injuries and illnesses and improved relationships with one another and with OSHA. However, the agency has just begun to evaluate its programs and much of its data are insufficient for evaluation. For example, data on one program are inconsistent, making comparisons difficult, and goals for another program are individually developed and not readily measurable. The lack of such data makes it difficult for OSHA to articulate priorities and necessary resource allocations. The additional strategies that researchers and specialists suggested generally fell into four categories: providing more incentives to encourage additional employers to voluntarily improve workplace safety and health; promoting more systematic approaches to workplace safety and health; focusing more specifically on high-hazard, high-injury workplaces; and using third-party approaches to achieve voluntary compliance.

**Growth in Voluntary Compliance Programs, 1993 to 2003**

Number of worksites, partnerships, or programs



Source: OSHA.