



Voluntary Protection Programs Participants' Association, Inc.

March 23, 2009

The Honorable Hilda Solis
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Madam Secretary Solis,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your confirmation as the 25th Secretary of Labor for the United States. I am writing this letter on behalf of the Voluntary Protection Programs Participants' Association, Inc. (VPPPA) to address the importance of voluntary cooperative programs in fulfilling the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) mission to "assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women"; something that requires the careful balance of both enforcement methods and cooperative programs.

"We know that a safe workplace is a successful workplace and much needs to be done at the federal level to protect health and safety."

- U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) at GE-Lynn's VPP Star celebration

The Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) have proven to be OSHA's premier programs, adding value to workplace safety and health by encouraging worksites to go beyond mere compliance. VPP sites are known for safety and health management systems that foster a strong safety and health culture, continuous improvement and partnerships among management, labor and government, which are fundamental to the success of VPP with a dedicated workforce of almost 900,000 employees across the United States. Over 2,000 sites, covering about 270 industries, with more than 25 percent represented by unionized sites, have achieved VPP status and have injury and illness rates that are 60 percent below industry norms.

VPP provides companies with a dynamic approach to encourage safety and health beyond targeted goals of traditional enforcement. Based on the cooperative relationship among management, labor and government, VPP promotes worker protection, requiring active employee involvement, management commitment and union support. This program improves communication within the worksite, positively affecting relationships between the workers and managers and resulting in better productivity. The VPP process emphasizes continual identification and elimination of hazards as worksites strive to excel in workplace safety and health.

VPPPA provides a network of over 2,000 worksites that are involved in or in the process of applying to VPP as administered by OSHA, the Department of Energy (DOE) and other government agencies that are developing or implementing cooperative recognition programs. Our nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization, provides occupational safety, health and environmental leaders with a direct link to OSHA, DOE and similar agencies within State-Plan States, networking

and educational offerings, up-to-the-minute legislative information, industry advancements, preferred vendors and consultants dedicated to VPP, mentoring opportunities, professional development and volunteer opportunities.

“At these [VPP] worksites, worker safety and health, instead of being relegated to the sidelines or delegated to a single individual, is a fundamental part of the company's business, a value as central to success as producing goods and services or making a fair profit.”

- Charles N. Jeffries, former Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA,

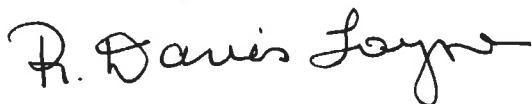
<http://republicans.smbiz.house.gov/hearings/106th/1999/990722/jeffress.asp>

Once the VPP process begins, the principles of the program are adopted and a safety and health community is formed. For example, International Paper (IP) is one of many corporations dedicated to safety and health with 87 total worksites that have achieved VPP. During the summer of 2006, a business case comparison of VPP and non-VPP sites was completed by an IP environment, safety and health manager. The study proved VPP sites to be significantly safer and healthier as well as more productive with increased morale, at the worksite resulting in a return on investment of 31 percent for larger worksites at IP. The study found that VPP worksites improve safety and health practices more over the course of a year than non-VPP sites, displaying the effectiveness of the programs. This is typical across all industries as more companies are finding and adopting VPP.

The successful implementation of the Special Government Employee (SGE) program for VPP exemplifies the commitment to safety and health by VPP worksites. Corporations support employees in becoming SGEs and assisting OSHA personnel during VPP onsite evaluations. Not only does the SGE program supplement OSHA resources in performing onsite evaluations, this innovative program gives industry, government and labor an opportunity to work together to enhance workforce protection across the nation.

With the successes of the federal and state-plan OSHA programs, the Department of Energy adopted the program and, more recently, the Department of Defense has made a commitment for its civilian workforce to embrace OSHA VPP principles. The new administration's support of VPP will encourage safety and health beyond mere compliance with OSHA standards to foster a healthy working environment for the American workforce.

Respectfully,



R. Davis Layne
VPPPA Executive Director