



OSHA Proposes a Definition of “Combustible Dust”

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is proposing a definition for “combustible dust” that is generated in a workplace. If adopted, the definition would appear in the agency’s Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200). It would cover dust generated in a wide range of industrial settings, possibly including reconditioning facilities. Activities such as steel shot blasting and possibly plastic shredding or grinding operations may be affected by the proposed rule.

OSHA proposes to define combustible dust as: “...finely divided solid particles of a substance or mixture that are liable to catch fire or explode on ignition when dispersed in air or other oxidizing media.”

The current proposal would not mandate the use of specific control technology, risk analysis, monitoring or retrofits of existing equipment or property. OSHA is simply proposing to adopt the definition recently issued by the UN Subcommittee of Experts for a Globally Harmonized System (GHS). If adopted, employers for whom combustible dust is a concern would be expected to communicate this potential hazard to employees.

OSHA may choose to take further action in the future. Currently, regulators look to the Code on Combustible Dust issued by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA 654). OSHA inspectors can select particular measures or practices in the NFPA Code and apply them to plants where dust is a concern.

If the rule is adopted, RIPA will update its HazCom training module, which is available to all members. RIPA will continue to report on the issue of combustible dust and advise members of measures and practices that can lower the risk of a dangerous event involving potentially hazardous dust.