

OSHA and Shop Workers

Automotive shop workers are especially vulnerable to chemicals and other workplace hazards, which is why the U.S. Department of Labor and the Occupational Safety and Health Act established workplace standards for auto mechanics and the shops they work in. Regulations cover everything from letting mechanics know their rights to making the proper equipment available to workers. The regulations are continually updated as well to keep up with changes in the industry. Failure to comply can result in a variety of penalties, from fines to permanent closure of an auto shop business.

Right to Know

One of the OSHA standards most regularly violated by auto shops is the right to know standard. This addresses the use of potentially hazardous chemicals, a very common occurrence in the automotive business. This standard simply requires that employees be notified in detail of the possible dangers of any of the chemicals they are using. OSHA insists that employees have a right to know how they might be affected by chemicals in the workplace. The right to know standard requires detailed labeling of all chemicals, inventory lists with information, training for employees in the safe use of chemicals and a written plan that outlines how the workplace plans to follow the right to know provision.

Protective Equipment

Many of the most common ways in which auto shops violate OSHA regulations is by not providing adequate safety equipment for the workers. Shops are required to have written plans and safety equipment to deal with the hazards that many employees are exposed to at work. For example, workers are supposed to use respirators when painting. Auto shops are required to provide safety equipment, ranging from goggles to noise reduction devices that are readily available and maintained in good condition. Some of the more common citations for body shops involve inadequate use or supply of respiratory safety equipment and insufficient numbers of fire extinguishers.

Tools

There are a variety of OSHA standards that govern the use of tools in auto shops. All tools must be maintained in good condition so that they may be safely used, and employees should be informed of the proper use of all tools and possible dangers. Some of the larger, more standardized tools, such as the car lift, must be inspected and serviced on a regular basis in order to be up to standard with OSHA. There are strict standards for the storage of tools. For example, all tools that can move must be removed from power, secured and locked out of the shop during cleaning in order to protect against movement. This applies to cars as well.

Shop Space

The layout of the shop itself also must be up to certain safety standards. The floor must be kept uncluttered and should provide easy access for walking. All spills should be cleaned up immediately, and tools and parts that are not being used should be put away. There are also broader regulations for the shop layout, such as standards for electrical wiring. One of the bigger hazards in auto shops is flammability, and OSHA is known for citing auto shops for not addressing this issue. Fire extinguishers and fire plans are expected, and auto shops are supposed to have a flameproof booth for doing things such as spray finishing and using flammable materials.