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## **MEXICO'S REVISED STANDARD ON SAFETY CONDITIONS IN BUILDINGS AND WORK AREAS**

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In this issue we review the revised Official Mexican Standard NOM-001-STPS-2008, "Safety conditions in buildings, premises, facilities, and workplace areas" issued by Mexico's Secretariat of Labor and Social Security (STPS in Spanish), and published in the Official Journal of the Federation (similar to the U. S. Federal Register) on November 24, 2008. The standard went into effect 60 days following its publication.

The standard establishes the safety conditions in buildings, premises, facilities, and workplace areas to ensure their proper operation and maintenance, in order to prevent hazards to workers.

It contains specifications and measures to regulate the workplace, including conditions of roofs, walls, floors, aisles, platforms, ramps, stairways, railings, fixed and portable ladders, emergency exits, artificial ventilation, transit of people and of industrial and cargo vehicles, restrooms, and lunchrooms, as well as building maintenance, and criteria for evaluating compliance with the requirements.

Maintaining safe conditions in the workplace to prevent hazards continues to be one of the employer's main responsibilities, with certain additional requirements, such as:

- Conducting visual inspections of the workplace every 12 months to identify unsafe conditions and repair any uncovered damages. These inspections may be scheduled by areas to ease implementation.
- The results of the inspections must be recorded in logs, on magnetic media, or in the verification reports of the facility's health and safety commission.
- The records must be kept for one year and, at a minimum include the verification date, name of the area inspected, and, if appropriate, the type of incident, the results of the inspection, and the corrective actions taken.
- Conducting visual inspections following an incident that could cause damage to the workplace, and,

- Performing the necessary accommodations, modifications, or repairs to guarantee the safety of the occupants. The results must be recorded in a log, or on magnetic media, and kept for one year.

In addition to having clean and safe restrooms for the use of workers, as required in the previous version, the facility must now also have areas reserved for eating.

Likewise, the requirement to have showers and dressing rooms, depending on the type of work performed, now also applies when it is necessary to decontaminate workers.

Another modification applies to disabled workers, where the doors, access and transit corridors, stairs, service areas and workstations must facilitate the workers' activities and movement.

Walls in the workplace must only be used to support loads if they were designed for such a purpose. Wall openings higher than two meters (6.5 feet) from a level on the opposite side of the wall where a fall hazard exists must have signage and protection against the hazard.

Floors must also have safety signage in accordance to the recently revised safety colors and signs standard, NOM-026-STPS-2008, wherever there are hazards from level changes, or due to the work activities performed on them.

The revised NOM contains new safety requirements for exterior emergency exit stairs and ladders, including:

- Access doors that open in the direction of normal egress of people, with latches that open easily from inside, with their corresponding automatic closing device, and that allow the free flow of people during an emergency.
- Access doors must have maintenance at least every six months, properly recorded with the date, type of maintenance, and name and signature of the people who performed it.

A new requirement mandates that the distance between rungs in fixed ladders must not exceed 38 centimeters (cm.), equivalent to 14.96 inches.

There are important changes in the safety requirements for vehicle transit. Doors used for movement of both vehicles and workers must have delimited aisles, yellow floor markings, or barriers that allow the safe transit of workers. However, the aisle no longer has to have a minimum width of 80 cm. (31.5 inches). If such spacing is not possible, then signage prohibiting the simultaneous movement of people and vehicles must be placed.

Now, it is the employer's responsibility to set the speed limits for vehicles to ensure the safe movement of workers, external personnel, and vehicles, so that they do not constitute a workplace risk factor. The limits ranging from 10 to 20 kilometers per hour (6-12 miles per hour) set in the previous standard for various locations have been eliminated. The maximum speed limit for vehicles must be posted in loading and unloading areas, vehicle yards, establishments, and in other areas.

The procedure for evaluating compliance is a new element added to all the new and recently revised standards. This applies to both inspections conducted by the health and

safety agency, as well as those performed by third party verification units. The procedure consists of a list of the verification items subject to physical inspection or record review to evaluate compliance with the standard. This list can also serve as a self-audit tool to be used by facility health and safety personnel.

Lastly, NOM-001-STPS-2008 contains three brief reference guides that are not mandatory, and instead are offered to facilitate comprehension of the standard. Reference Guide I on Comfort Ventilation has been expanded in the new version and applies, among other occupancies to offices, control rooms, computer rooms and laboratories, which have artificial ventilation for the comfort of workers or as a requirement of the work activities. The guide recommends considering relative humidity, temperature, and air velocity, within the following preferred ranges:

- Relative humidity between 20% and 60%;
- Air temperature of 22°C ± 2°C (68°F -75.2°F) during the cold season, and 24.5°C ± 1.5°C (73.4°F - 78.8°F) in the warm season;
- Average air velocity not to exceed 0.15 meters per second (m/s), or 29.5 feet per minute (fpm), in the cold season, and 0.25 m/s (49.2 fpm) in the warm season, and,
- Recommends keeping air exchange rates at no less than five times per hour.

The reference guide also recommends that the ventilation system inspection and maintenance programs check for such items as: air regulation, airflow control, acoustic insulation, limits on noise propagation, preventing water condensation, and electrical installations.

The two new reference guides are Hazards in Use of Fixed Ladders, and a set of drawings of Types of Most Common Stairways Used in the Workplace.

If you have questions about this topic or other environmental, and health and safety issues, please contact us at (619) 297-1469 or send us an email at [emedina@pulse-point.com](mailto:emedina@pulse-point.com).

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