

OSHA CITATION CASE STUDY

Repeated Housekeeping Failures Lead to More Than **\$15 Million** in Penalties

Violations of workplace health and safety standards and subsequent OSHA citations can impact organizations of all sizes and sectors. In addition to highlighting unaddressed safety hazards, these citations often carry a number of consequences, including costly penalties, diminished workforce morale and widespread reputational damages. With this in mind, it's vital for organizations to prioritize workplace safety and OSHA compliance to better protect their employees and mitigate the risk of potential citations and related violations. One of the best ways to do so is by analyzing past OSHA citations issued to other organizations and identifying key takeaways to prevent similar incidents. This case study outlines a recent OSHA citation and explains what the affected organization could have done to avoid it.

What Happened?

In January 2023, OSHA issued multiple citations against a nationwide discount retailer for exposing its workers to unsafe conditions at two store locations in Florida and one in Alabama, therefore violating the general requirements standard (29 CFR 1910.22). These citations came after OSHA inspections conducted between June and July 2022 revealed poor housekeeping practices at the three stores. Specifically, these store locations had merchandise blocking emergency exit routes, posing fire and entrapment hazards. The store in Alabama also had boxes stockpiled in unstable stacks across its storeroom, creating potential struck-by hazards. Consequently, the Florida store locations received \$196,438 in proposed penalties, whereas the Alabama store location faced \$205,117 in proposed penalties.

These are not the first OSHA citations issued to the discount retailer. This company has a history of repeated, willful and serious safety failures at store locations across the country. In 2022 alone,



19 OSHA inspections at store locations throughout several Southeastern states discovered dozens of similar housekeeping violations, putting employees at risk of being unable to safely evacuate amid emergencies and increasing their likelihood of experiencing struck-by incidents. Such inspections collectively led to more than 30 violations and nearly \$6.8 million in proposed penalties. Altogether, the company has received more than \$15 million in OSHA penalties since 2017.

What Could Have Been Done?

In order to prevent its latest OSHA citations, the discount retailer could have taken various precautions, including:

- **Ensuring proper housekeeping protocols** — Such protocols should focus on keeping all passage-ways, storerooms and walking-working surfaces clean, orderly and sanitary. These areas should also be free of safety issues such as sharp or protruding objects, loose or uneven flooring, and slip hazards (e.g., spilled liquids, water, snow and ice). Common housekeeping protocols may entail upholding a routine workplace cleaning schedule, establishing response measures for spill incidents or adverse weather conditions, and performing regular floor maintenance and repairs as needed.
- **Safeguarding emergency exit routes** — An emergency exit route consists of three main components: the pathway leading to the exit (also called the exit access), the exit itself and the area directly following the exit (also known as the exit discharge). Typically, a workplace must have at least two emergency exit routes available—even during building repairs, maintenance or alterations. Each component of these routes should be properly lit, clearly marked and kept unobstructed at all times to allow for easy access. Such routes must also be clear of potential hazards and designed in a way that allows employees to avoid high-risk areas on-site. These routes should be communicated to employees during routine safety training, included in documented emergency evacuation plans and regularly evaluated to ensure they remain in good condition.
- **Training employees on material handling** — Employees who are required to lift, move and reach for objects should receive adequate training on safe material handling procedures. As it pertains to employees who work in storerooms, this training should highlight proper methods for stacking and organizing boxes, merchandise or other items on-site. These methods can help minimize the likelihood of cluttered storerooms, unstable stockpiles and associated struck-by incidents.

For additional OSHA updates and workplace safety resources, contact us today.