

# Federal OSHA Takes Lead on Cannabis Industry Worker Safety Amid Rising Legalization Rates

## Federal OSHA to Address Worker Safety in Expanding Cannabis Industry

Despite marijuana's federal illegality, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) representatives are gearing up to share insights on worker protection within the burgeoning cannabis sector. Scheduled for April 16, a webinar organized by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP) will feature two OSHA experts, Yasmine Daniels and Virginia Weaver, discussing the agency's latest guidelines and enforcement priorities.

The event aims to shed light on OSHA's enforcement strategies and compliance resources, underscoring recent inspections within the cannabis domain. Given the evolving landscape of state-legal markets, the discussion will emphasize potential hazards encountered by workers in cannabis cultivation and processing facilities.

Research indicates that employees in the cannabis industry face occupational risks, including allergies triggered by cannabis plants and exposure to various biological, chemical, and physical workplace hazards. A tragic incident in Massachusetts in 2022, where a 27-year-old worker collapsed and later passed away during a shift, underscored the importance of addressing such concerns.

Despite lacking specific standards tailored to cannabis-related allergies, OSHA aims to mitigate these risks through existing protocols while addressing other potential hazards prevalent in the industry. However, navigating federal prohibition complicates OSHA's regulatory approach, as highlighted by Andrew Levinson, director of OSHA's Directorate of Standards and Guidance.

In response to the Massachusetts incident, the involved company, Trulieve, settled with OSHA and agreed to conduct a study on the classification of ground cannabis dust as a hazardous chemical. Such incidents underscore the urgency for comprehensive safety standards in the cannabis sector.

Advocates, including leaders of prominent labor unions, have called for federal action to address workplace safety in the legal cannabis industry. Efforts are underway to advocate for a national workplace safety standard, drawing inspiration from existing regulations in states like California.

As the cannabis industry continues to expand, ensuring the safety and well-being of workers remains a paramount concern. The upcoming webinar signifies a crucial step in fostering dialogue and enhancing safety protocols within this rapidly evolving sector.