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## Cracking Down on Rogue Employers

**T**he Bush administration's belated determination to enforce workplace safety rules against flagrant violators may be the best one can hope for from an administration that seems allergic to tight regulation of business. But the new enforcement policy falls short of what is truly needed.

The new policies were prompted by a recent New York Times series examining McWane Inc., a pipe manufacturer that has been cited for more than 400 safety violations since 1995, a period during which 4,600 workers were injured and 9 were killed; 3 of those deaths were caused by deliberate violations of federal safety standards. An inept response by regulators failed to halt the infractions.

To its credit, the administration has now given the Occupational Safety and Health Administration orders to coordinate its inspections at far-flung work sites and conduct follow-up inspections for the most severe violations. OSHA will also seek court orders to force recalcitrant companies to comply.

Unfortunately these steps, though commendable, do not go far enough to force the worst employers to take OSHA regulations seriously. That will require much stiffer penalties. As it stands, civil fines are typically modest, and criminal penalties are so minimal — a maximum of six months in jail — that prosecutors seldom bring cases. Senator Jon Corzine, Democrat of New Jersey, has proposed that employers who cause the death of a worker by willfully violating safety laws be subject to 10 years in jail. That sounds like an excellent way to deter company managements from flouting safety rules.

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