

Don't let dust get you in trouble with OSHA

If you scrimp on safety when it comes to your trim and dust collection system, OSHA has a surprise for you. A single willful or repeat violation can now cost employers over \$120,000.



Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is [increasing its maximum penalties](#) for workplace safety violations by over 78 percent. Effective August 1, the maximum penalty for serious violations will increase from \$7,000 per violation to \$12,471. The ceiling for each willful or repeat violation will rise from \$70,000 to \$124,709.

If you rely on a trim, dust or fiber waste removal system in your production process, this is important. OSHA doesn't kid around when it comes to the presence of combustible dust in work areas. They come down hard. So if your trim or dust collection system isn't working correctly, there's likely combustible dust accumulating. If one person complains to OSHA and an inspector arrives, you could be cited. How much? Here are just a few examples:

- A Pennsylvania company was cited by OSHA earlier in 2016 for not having an explosion vent on the dust collector and discharging exhaust air back into the bindery. This was a costly mistake. The fine came in at around \$117,000, with approximately \$74,000 related to safety violations in and around their combustible dust and baler system. The engineering consultant they hired to remediate the problem added another \$35,000 to the bill.

- An Ohio printing company paid nearly \$100,000 in fines for 24 safety violations, including failing to maintain an environment free of combustible dust.
- A printer in New York paid more than \$62,000 in fines for 27 violations, including the accumulation of combustible dust in a work area.

The fines are only going to go up. The maximum penalties were last adjusted in 1990, so this recent bump is the initial catch-up increase to reflect inflation over the past 25 years.

Fines aren't the only thing you need to worry about. If you're cited, the news will be released to local media and will be posted on OSHA's website. Can you afford the bad publicity, especially if you're operating in a tight labor market or with tighter profit margins?

If you're concerned about how your company would fare in the event of an OSHA inspection regarding combustible dust, let us know. We can help you get your scrap and dust collection system in shape. Call G.F. Puhl at 615.230.9500 or [email us](#).