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## **OSHA to Define New Standards for Handling Industrial and Wood Dust**

New Rules Are A Response to Fires, Explosions Traced to Combustible Dust

**April, 2011** - Federal regulators are drawing up new standards for handling industrial and wood dust following a series of fires and explosions related to combustible dust. The Wood Machinery Manufacturers of America wants to make industrial and wood products companies aware of the new regulations and of the need to handle combustible dust safely.

WMMA's Industrial Dust Task Force has been following the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on the new rules since October 2009. OSHA is currently reviewing all the comments from the various stakeholder meetings held in 2009 and 2010.

The goal is to ensure that companies follow proper dust collection procedures. "In reality, wood dust lingers, and when you take an air gun and blow off the work surface that just suspends it in the air and causes dispersion, which is not a good thing," says Jamison Scott, chairman of the Industrial Dust Task Force. "The dust settles on beams and in crevices, and above hung ceilings, potentially creating fuel for an explosion. "Optimally dust must be collected via a properly designed and installed dust collection system, along with a hanging air filtration unit to pick up any fine airborne dust and a vacuum to collect stray dust that has settled on surfaces."

OSHA is modeling its new rules on the voluntary standards of the National Fire Protection Association, which are widely used by local fire marshals and building inspectors. NFPA is currently reviewing its standards as well.

The issue took on added urgency after a 2008 explosion at the Imperial Sugar refinery in Georgia killed 14 people and injured 38 others. Investigators determined the explosion was fueled by large concentrations of combustible sugar dust. More than 350 such explosions have occurred in the United States since 1980.

In February, Georgia Congressman John Barrow introduced the Worker Protection Against Combustible Dust Explosions and Fires Act, which if passed into law would require the Secretary of Labor to issue an interim occupational safety and health standard regarding worker exposure to combustible dust, and for other purposes.

Scott said the WMMA fully supports efforts to protect workers against the dangers of combustible dust. However, the organization is encouraging OSHA to avoid creating new economic hardships for woodworking companies and small manufacturers.

"If companies can't afford to meet the regulations, then we will not have accomplished what we wanted and the worker does not get protected," said Scott, vice president of Air Handling Systems in Woodbridge, Conn.

The WMMA is also concerned about an NFPA proposal to consolidate dust standards among five different industries, because woodworking shops could lose special exemptions related to the small size of many of their workplaces.

The organization also is encouraging OSHA to ensure any new regulations are comprehensive, definitive, realistic and easy to understand and apply.