

HR Insights

2026 Occupational Health Compliance Timeline



Introduction

As employers prepare for 2026, the occupational health compliance landscape is entering a period of significant transition. OSHA is advancing updates to long-standing standards, including phased changes to the Hazard Communication Standard, potential adjustments to respiratory protection requirements, and new rules addressing emerging risks such as heat-related illness and workplace violence in healthcare settings.

At the same time, the agency faces budgetary and staffing reductions that are expected to shift enforcement priorities toward high-hazard industries while leaving greater responsibility for compliance on employers themselves. State-plan OSHA programs may further accelerate regulatory activity, creating a patchwork of requirements across jurisdictions.

This timeline highlights the most important milestones expected in 2026, with links to authoritative sources to help organizations anticipate, plan, and adapt their occupational health programs.





January 19th, 2026

OSHA Hazard Communication Standard (HazCom) Update - Phase 1

- Alignment with GHS Rev. 7 (and some Rev. 8).
- Employers must begin updating **SDSs, labeling, and hazard classifications**.
- Full compliance required **by January 19th, 2028**.

Source:

- [ERA Environmental – HazCom Update Timeline \(Sept. 2024\)](#)

Proposed, Subject to Finalization

Respiratory Protection Update

- Possible removal of medical evaluations for filtering facepiece respirators and loose-fitting PAPRs.

Source:

- [OSHA Proposed Deregulatory Rulemaking](#)

General Duty Clause Interpretation

- Proposal to limit § 5(a)(1) use for “inherent hazards.”

Source:

- [Haynes Boone OSHA Regulatory Update](#)

Proposed, Subject to Finalization (cont.)

Workplace Violence Prevention (Healthcare & Social Services)

- Part of OSHA's current regulatory agenda.

Source:

- [Safety+Health Magazine - OSHA Agenda Coverage \(June, 2025\)](#).

Heat Illness/Injury Prevention Standard

- Federal rule under development

Source:

- [Safety+Health Magazine - OSHA Agenda Coverage \(June, 2025\)](#).

Powered Industrial Truck Standard Update

- Modernization proposal.

Source:

- [Safety+Health Magazine - OSHA Agenda Coverage \(June, 2025\)](#).





OSHA Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Reduction

- \$50 million budget cuts, approximately 233 fewer staff.
- Possibly anticipate fewer inspections, with more focus on high-risk sectors.

Sources:

- [Ogletree Deakins - OSHA FY 2026 Budget Review \(July, 2025\).](#)
- [J.J. Keller - OSHA Budget Analysis \(July, 2025\).](#)






Occupational Health Compliance Checklist for HR Professionals (2026)




Hazard Communication (HazCom)

-  Review and update Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) to align with OSHA's revised Hazard Communications Standard (GHS Rev. 7)
-  Ensure all chemical labels meet new formatting and classifications requirements.
-  Provide updated HazCom training to employees as revised SDSs and labels circulate
-  Track downstream compliance deadlines leading up to Jan. 19th, 2028.

Respiratory Protection

-  Monitor OSHA's rulemaking on respiratory protection medical evaluations; prepare for possible removal of evaluation requirements for certain respirators
-  Continue conducting fit testing, training, and hazard assessments per OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134.
-  Document any program changes to maintain audit readiness.

Recordkeeping and Reporting

-  Maintain compliance with existing OSHA injury and illness recordkeeping rules (Form 300, 300A, and 310)
-  Monitor for changes to electronic reporting or rescission of COVID-19 recordkeeping rules in healthcare.
-  Audit recordkeeping practices to ensure accurate and timely entries.

Occupational Health Compliance Checklist for HR Professionals (2026)

Enforcements and Audits

- Anticipate fewer but more targeted inspections due to OSHA's reduced budget. Prioritize compliance in high-hazard sectors.
- Conduct internal audits/self-inspections to identify and correct gaps.

State-Level Requirements

- For multi-state employers, monitor state-plan OSHA programs for stricter requirements on heat stress, chemicals, or injury prevention.
- Ensure HR teams in each state are aware of both federal and local obligations.

Workforce Engagement

- Communicate upcoming regulatory changes to employees in plain language.
- Encourage employee feedback on workplace hazards to strengthen compliance and morale.

Strategic Planning

- Align HR policies with ADA, FMLA, and worker's comp where OSH changes intersect with employee health.
- Budget for additional training, policy updates, and technology to manage compliance transitions.
- Document all proactive steps to demonstrate good-faith compliance in case of inspections or audits.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, 2026 will be a pivotal year for occupational health compliance. While some regulatory changes will reduce administrative burdens, others will expand employer responsibilities in areas such as hazard communication, workplace violence prevention, and heat illness protection. Coupled with reduced federal enforcement resources and growing divergence among state-level programs, employers cannot afford a reactive approach.

Organizations that invest early in updating policies, training, and recordkeeping systems will be better positioned to navigate uncertainty, demonstrate compliance during inspections, and safeguard their workforce. By treating 2026 as both a compliance challenge and an opportunity to strengthen safety culture, employers can mitigate risk while reinforcing their commitment to employee health and operational resilience.



Download the Checklist



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Sources

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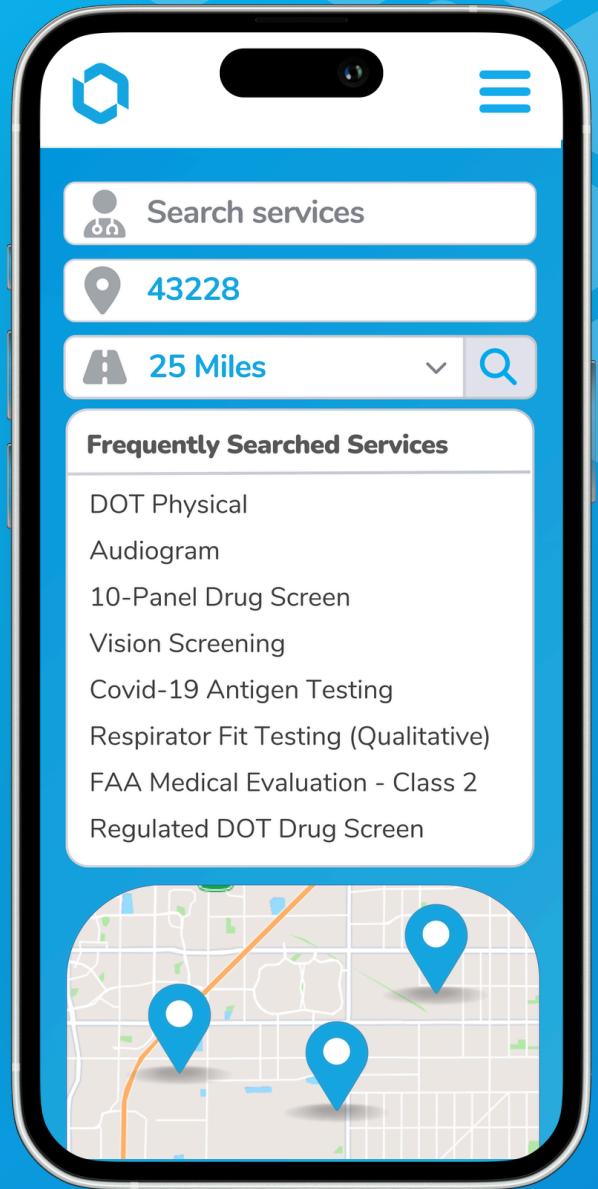
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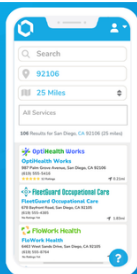


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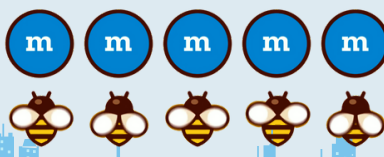


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