



Occupational Safety & Health Reporter™

Source: Occupational Safety & Health Reporter: News Archive > 2011 > 07/14/2011 > News > Regulatory Policy: OSHA Is Top-Rated Agency in Voter Poll; Workplace Regulations Also Garner Support

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Regulatory Policy

OSHA Is Top-Rated Agency in Voter Poll; Workplace Regulations Also Garner Support

Among a group of seven regulatory agencies, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration drew the most positive ratings in a recent poll of likely 2012 general election voters.

Forty-seven percent of poll-takers rated OSHA's performance as "good" or "excellent," while 39 percent said OSHA's performance was either "just fair" or "poor," giving the agency a plus-eight overall score, according to the survey report. (The remaining 14 percent did not respond to the question.)

Of the 47 percent who gave a positive review of OSHA's performance, 6 percent said the agency was doing an "excellent" job.

OSHA and the Agriculture Department, which scored a plus four, were the only two regulatory agencies to draw net positive job performance ratings in the poll, conducted by Lake Research Partners on behalf of the watchdog group OMB Watch. The Environmental Protection Agency, with 34 percent positive responses but 59 percent negative, scored the worst, with a minus-25 overall score.

A research note accompanying the report pointed out, however, that "[t]here is little intensity to these ratings," meaning the final scores may be "malleable."

OSHA performed even better among "persuadable" voters, defined by the survey as those who "neither favor nor strongly oppose greater regulation of big business initially."

Fifty-two percent of those voters rated OSHA's performance positively, with 36 percent giving a negative grade, for a plus 16 rating. That was the second-highest overall score among the seven agencies included in the poll.

The Agriculture Department scored plus-19 among persuadable voters. EPA again performed the worst, at minus-18.

Regulation Also Favored

The poll also found that 37 percent of poll-takers said more regulation is needed in the area of workplace safety, while 20 percent said worker safety rules need to be pared back. Among the 37 percent who answered positively, 11 percent said they very strongly believed more safety regulation is needed.

More broadly, 40 percent of the participants favored increasing regulation of big business, versus 23 percent who opposed, even though a majority of them (54 percent) also said they had concerns about overregulation.

The support for regulation is particularly acute when presented in terms of accountability and protection, the report found.

When asked to identify the positive traits of government regulation, the highest-ranked trait, with 57 percent of poll-takers responding, was that it is "one way to protect people from physical harm."

When asked about regulation's negative traits, the top response (69 percent) was that it is a "a creator of red tape." The third-highest response (60 percent) said it "hurts small businesses." Only 47 percent said regulation is "unnecessary," making it the ninth and lowest-ranked response on the list.

"The polling shows that a substantial majority of American voters support OSHA and its mission," said

Justin Feldman, worker health and safety advocate for Public Citizen, which was not involved in the survey. "But instead of rewarding their constituents' favorite government agency, congressional conservatives are trying to slash OSHA's budget and add new roadblocks to its already onerous rulemaking process. On this issue, there is a clear disconnect between the people and their representatives."

By Stephen Lee

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ISSN 1522-4082

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