

§ 1975.3

29 CFR Ch. XVII (7-1-05 Edition)

constitutional prohibitions and those restrictions Congress, itself, places on it. (“United States v. Wrightwood Dairy Co.,” 315 U.S. 110; and “United States v. Darby,” supra.) Since there are no specific constitutional prohibitions involved, the issue is reduced to the question: How inclusive did Congress intend the class of activities to be under the Williams-Steiger Act?

§ 1975.3 Extent of coverage.

(a) Section 2(b) of the Williams-Steiger Occupational Safety and Health Act (Public Law 91-596) sets forth the purpose and policy of Congress in enacting this legislation. In pertinent part, that section reads as follows:

(b) Congress declares it to be its purpose and policy, through the exercise of its powers to regulate commerce among the several States and with foreign nations and to provide for the general welfare, to assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the Nation safe and healthful working conditions and to preserve our human resources
* * *

Congressman William Steiger described the scope of the Act’s coverage in the following words during a discussion of the legislation on the floor of the House of Representatives:

The coverage of this bill is as broad, generally speaking, as the authority vested in the Federal Government by the commerce clause of the Constitution (Cong. Rec., vol. 116, p. H-11899, Dec. 17, 1970)

The legislative history, as a whole, clearly shows that every amendment or other proposal which would have resulted in any employee’s being left outside the protections afforded by the Act was rejected. The reason for excluding no employee, either by exemption or limitation on coverage, lies in the most fundamental of social purposes of this legislation which is to protect the lives and health of human beings in the context of their employment.

(b) The Williams-Steiger Act includes special provisions (sections 19 and 18(c)(6)) for the protection of Federal and State employees to whom the Act’s other provisions are made inapplicable under section 3(5), which excludes from the definition of the term “employer”

both the United States and any State or political subdivision of a State.

(c) In the case of section 4(b)(1) of the Act, which makes the Act inapplicable to working conditions to the extent they are protected under laws administered by other Federal agencies, Congress did not intend to grant any general exemptions under the Act; its sole purpose was to avoid duplication of effort by Federal agencies in establishing a national policy of occupational safety and health protection.

(d) Interpretation of the provisions and terms of the Williams-Steiger Act must of necessity be consistent with the express intent of Congress to exercise its commerce power to the extent that, “so far as possible, every working man and woman in the Nation” would be protected as provided for in the Act. The words “so far as possible” refer to the practical extent to which governmental regulation and expended resources are capable of achieving safe and healthful working conditions; the words are not ones of limitation on coverage. The controlling definition for the purpose of coverage under the Act is that of “employer” contained in section 3(5). This term is defined as follows:

(5) The term “employer” means any person engaged in a business affecting commerce who has employees, but does not include the United States or any State or political subdivision of a State.

In carrying out the broad coverage mandate of Congress, we interpret the term “business” in the above definition as including any commercial or non-commercial activity affecting commerce and involving the employment of one or more employees; the term “commerce” is defined in the Act itself, in section 3(3). Since the legislative history and the words of the statute, itself, indicate that Congress intended the full exercise of its commerce power in order to reduce employment-related hazards which, as a whole impose a substantial burden on commerce, it follows that all employments where such hazards exist or could exist (that is, those involving the employment of one or more employees) were intended to be regulated as a class of activities which affects commerce.