

§ 1977.10

(c) Further, the salutary principles of the Act would be seriously undermined if employees were discouraged from lodging complaints about occupational safety and health matters with their employers. (Section 2(1), (2), and (3)). Such complaints to employers, if made in good faith, therefore would be related to the Act, and an employee would be protected against discharge or discrimination caused by a complaint to the employer.

§ 1977.10 Proceedings under or related to the Act.

(a) Discharge of, or discrimination against, any employee because the employee has "instituted or caused to be instituted any proceeding under or related to this Act" is also prohibited by section 11(c). Examples of proceedings which could arise specifically under the Act would be inspections of work-sites under section 8 of the Act, employee contest of abatement date under section 10(c) of the Act, employee initiation of proceedings for promulgation of an occupational safety and health standard under section 6(b) of the Act and part 1911 of this chapter, employee application for modification of revocation of a variance under section 6(d) of the Act and part 1905 of this chapter, employee judicial challenge to a standard under section 6(f) of the Act and employee appeal of an Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission order under section 11(a) of the Act. In determining whether a "proceeding" is "related to" the Act, the considerations discussed in §1977.9 would also be applicable.

(b) An employee need not himself directly institute the proceedings. It is sufficient if he sets into motion activities of others which result in proceedings under or related to the Act.

§ 1977.11 Testimony.

Discharge of, or discrimination against, any employee because the employee "has testified or is about to testify" in proceedings under or related to the Act is also prohibited by section 11(c). This protection would of course not be limited to testimony in proceedings instituted or caused to be instituted by the employee, but would extend to any statements given in the

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course of judicial, quasi-judicial, and administrative proceedings, including inspections, investigations, and administrative rule making or adjudicative functions. If the employee is giving or is about to give testimony in any proceeding under or related to the Act, he would be protected against discrimination resulting from such testimony.

§ 1977.12 Exercise of any right afforded by the Act.

(a) In addition to protecting employees who file complaints, institute proceedings, or testify in proceedings under or related to the Act, section 11(c) also protects employees from discrimination occurring because of the exercise "of any right afforded by this Act." Certain rights are explicitly provided in the Act; for example, there is a right to participate as a party in enforcement proceedings (section 10). Certain other rights exist by necessary implication. For example, employees may request information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; such requests would constitute the exercise of a right afforded by the Act. Likewise, employees interviewed by agents of the Secretary in the course of inspections or investigations could not subsequently be discriminated against because of their cooperation.

(b)(1) On the other hand, review of the Act and examination of the legislative history discloses that, as a general matter, there is no right afforded by the Act which would entitle employees to walk off the job because of potential unsafe conditions at the workplace. Hazardous conditions which may be violative of the Act will ordinarily be corrected by the employer, once brought to his attention. If corrections are not accomplished, or if there is dispute about the existence of a hazard, the employee will normally have opportunity to request inspection of the workplace pursuant to section 8(f) of the Act, or to seek the assistance of other public agencies which have responsibility in the field of safety and health. Under such circumstances, therefore, an employer would not ordinarily be in violation of section 11(c) by taking action to discipline an employee for refusing to perform normal