

# PUBLICATION

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## OSHA Urges Retail Employers to Focus on Crowd Management During Holiday Sales

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**For the first time since 2002, Thanksgiving will fall on the last week in November, which is as late as possibly allowed. A preliminary Thanksgiving weekend shopping survey suggests that up to 140 million people plan to or will shop over the Thanksgiving weekend. Of those, nearly one-quarter (23.5%) or 33 million plan to shop on Thanksgiving day according to the National Retail Federation 2013 holiday spending survey. Black Friday will be the biggest day of the weekend, with approximately 97 million shoppers.**

What does this mean for retail employers? It means that effective crowd management should be high on the employer's list. Indeed, on November 18, 2013, the U.S. Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration ("OSHA") sent reminders to retailers as well as retail and fire associations about the importance of establishing precautions to prevent workplace injuries during major sales events, including Black Friday. OSHA has not forgotten the unfortunate events that occurred in 2008 when an employee was killed after being trampled to death when shoppers rushed through the store entrance to take advantage of holiday sales. According to Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health, "The busy shopping season should not put retail workers at risk of being injured or killed." To that end, employers are urged to adopt a crowd management plan and follow simple guidelines to prevent unnecessary harm to employees.

OSHA did not simply suggest that retailers establish a plan; it provided guidelines to help employers and store owners avoid injuries.<sup>1</sup>A few notable planning guidelines are:

- proper training regarding managing the event,
- designate a manager to make key decisions,
- prepare an emergency plan to address overcrowding and crowd rushing,
- hire additional staff as needed,
- set up barricades or rope lines for crowd management before customers arrive,
- designate employees to explain approach and entrance procedures to arriving customers,
- locate sales items in different parts of the store to prevent overcrowding in one place, and
- establish clear protocols for conflict resolution, including giving employees authority and proper training regarding how to calm frustrated shoppers.

While each situation will present different issues for employers, these guidelines are a good starting point for developing a crowd management control plan and lessening the risk of harm to employees. Crowd Management should definitely be added to the retail employer's Christmas list and checked twice prior to the sale.

<sup>1</sup> The fact sheet outlining these and other safety measures is available at [https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data\\_General\\_Facts/Crowd\\_Control.html](https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/Crowd_Control.html). The letters sent to major retailers, retail associations and fire associations can be viewed at <https://www.osha.gov/ooc/alerts-letters.html>.