

## *New Guidelines—*

# Working Conditions

The U.S. Department of Labor has announced new guidelines under which employee complaints of unsafe or unhealthful working conditions will be investigated, even if the complaints do not meet formal requirements.

L. Thomas Ashcraft, the Labor Department's associate assistant regional director for OSHA, said in Seattle that under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, any employee or employee representative who believes a hazardous condition exists in his workplace can request an inspection by notifying the nearest OSHA office or state job safety agency.

Washington, Oregon and Alaska have been authorized by OSHA to administer their own safety and health programs and their own regulations have similar provisions for such investigations, he added.

The 1970 Act requires that these complaints be written and signed and that they describe in adequate detail the suspected violation. OSHA has given high priority to investigating these complaints.

Ashcraft said that under the new guidelines, when complaints do not meet formal requirements, as with unsigned complaints, OSHA inspectors nevertheless will

attempt to investigate. If that complaint alleges a serious hazard, OSHA may conduct a high-priority inspection.

He stressed that upon request, complainants' names will be withheld from employers to avoid any possible recrimination for exercising their rights.

The new guidelines also direct OSHA's field staff to make every effort to assist employees in the preparation of a written formal complaint as soon as possible after receipt of a verbal informal complaint.