Republic Steel Faces $1.1M in Fines for Violations

SAM HANANEL, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republic Steel is facing more than $1.1 million in federal fines for two dozen safety violations at its manufacturing plant in Canton, Ohio.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration said Tuesday that the Canton-based company failed to provide workers enough protection from falling off runway girders 66 feet above the ground or perched over the plant's slag pit and furnace. Two workers were seriously injured in falls at the site last year.

The violations come just one year after Republic settled similar charges at its plant in Lorain, Ohio and agreed to address such safety issues at its other facilities.

"Republic Steel has a long history of OSHA violations and disregard for employee safety and health," said David Michaels, assistant secretary of Labor for occupational safety and health. He called it "unacceptable" that the company has not taken more effective steps to improve safety at the Canton plant, particularly in light of the 2012 settlement.

In an emailed statement late Tuesday, Chad McClimans, Republic Steel's director of environment, health and safety, said the company was "committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for our employees and takes these allegations seriously. We are currently reviewing the alleged citation items to determine an appropriate course of action."

Republic has 15 days to contest the penalties.

OSHA said it inspected the plant after receiving a formal complaint from the United Steelworkers Union, which alleged inadequate safeguards against falls, and other unsafe practices in the plant's melt shop. OSHA also cited the company for tripping hazards, lack of protective equipment for employees working around the furnace and using electrical panels not suitable for wet locations. Fifteen of the 24 violations were judged willful, meaning they were committed with intentional, knowing or voluntary disregard for the law or indifference to employee safety.

OSHA officials said Republic would remain in OSHA's Severe Violator Enforcement Program for employers that commit willful violations, repeat violations or fail to fix hazards after being cited. Republic was placed in the program in 2011. The designation allows OSHA to inspect any of Republic's facilities if there are reasonable grounds to believe similar violations are occurring.

The company employs 2,500 workers nationwide, and 600 at the Canton plant.

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