Collect and Review Hazard Information

Workplace injuries, illnesses, and incidents sometimes happen because a hazard wasn't noticed or planned for. It's very important to identify the hazards in your workplace—the ones that are there and the ones you can expect to be there in the future. The following steps can help you:

1. Involve your workers (Worksheet 1a)
2. Review other sources of hazard information (Worksheet 1b).

To-Do

- ☐ Ask your workers for help identifying hazards and situations that lead to injuries and illnesses.
- ☐ Train workers to recognize unsafe conditions.
- ☐ Get their input; note information that will later help you set priorities for controlling hazards.

What is a Hazard?

A workplace hazard is any condition, activity, or source that could, if left uncontrolled, lead to an injury or illness. Examples include:

- *Safety hazards*—slippery floors, broken ladder rungs, hot surfaces, machinery with moving parts, electrical hazards, confined spaces.
- *Health hazards*—chemicals, viruses, heat, noise.
- *Other hazards*—stress, workplace violence, activities that cause wear and tear on the body, assigning an untrained worker to a hazardous job.

It's rare for there to be just one hazard—when you find one, you'll likely find other, related ones. Don't just look at a hazard in isolation. Look at the situation that is allowing it to exist:

- Is some situation making it worse, such as short staffing or lack of necessary tools and equipment?
- Are workers not trained to recognize unsafe conditions?
- Is there not a system for recognizing, reporting, and addressing hazards?
- Does your workplace culture discourage people from speaking up about safety problems? (Does it just not encourage them?)

When you're identifying hazards, it's more effective to take a "systems" approach, rather than trying to find and fix them one at a time.

Involve your workers

Workers are the experts on the tasks they perform and the tools, equipment, and materials they use. This means they're often in the best place to identify safety and health concerns such as hazardous situations, unsafe conditions, close calls/near misses, and actual incidents. Remember that workers also need training to recognize unsafe conditions (see Training and Education, Worksheet 4).

Ask your workers to suggest the best way(s) to report situations or specific hazards. Do they want a regular time set aside to discuss safety? Do they want a way to report online? Would they like an anonymous option? (See Worker Participation, Worksheet 2, for more about setting up a clear process for reporting concerns.)

To collect hazard information, you can start by asking workers to think about all the tasks they and co-workers do (including non-routine tasks). As part of a conversation about safety, ask workers questions from the list on pages 3 and 4 (or your own questions). You can use their answers to set priorities for hazard prevention and control.

It's often helpful to ask how the job can be improved overall, not just from a safety and health standpoint. Many improvements will make things better in several areas, such as quality and productivity as well as safety and health.

Another way to get input about hazards and hazardous situations is to create a body map:

- Draw a large outline of a person on butcher paper or a white board. Include a front side and a back side.

- Ask workers to draw dots on the drawing—parts of the body that have been (or could be) injured or stressed by their jobs (including when something goes wrong).

- In the table below, record what workers have identified (body part, hazard, activity involved, work area).

FRONT   **BACK**
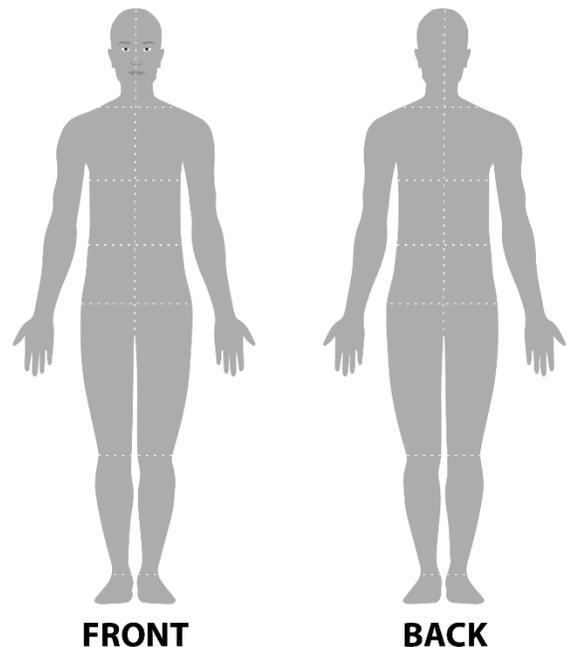
Body part	Hazard	Work activity involved	Work area	Notes*
Examples:				
Head	Tools falling from above	Plumbing repair	Mechanical room	Easily corrected
Finger	Cuts from opening boxes	Unpacking boxes	Warehouse	We don't have a policy to wear gloves for this task
Shoulder	Lifting heavy parts	Receiving deliveries	Shipping and receiving	Affects only two workers

Body part	Hazard	Work activity involved	Work area	Notes*
Eyes	Flying chips from metal grinding	Deburring parts	Machining area	Could cause serious injury
Lungs	Dust conditions	Sandblasting	Repair garage	Affects many workers
Skin	Exposure to hair bleaching chemicals that can cause contact dermatitis	Hair dyeing	Salon floor	Alternative products are available
Your list below:				

*During this activity, discuss and record characteristics of the hazard that will help you later in setting priorities for hazard control based on the level of risk (Worksheet 5). For example, you can assess risk by considering factors such as how many workers are affected, how often the hazard occurs, and how serious the potential injuries or illnesses may be. You can also choose to address hazards that are easy to fix ("low-hanging fruit") right away.

Example Questions for a Safety and Health Conversation

Below are some questions for workers about their jobs and work areas. This list isn't everything—be creative to spark discussion and get everyone thinking about improving work and making jobs safer.

- How can you get hurt (or sick) doing your tasks, or in your work areas?

- Are the hazards on your job under control?

- Which tasks put you near moving parts, hot surfaces, hazardous materials, or other hazards?

- Have there been injuries, illnesses, close calls, or near misses?

- What procedures are out of date or out of touch with the way work is actually done?

- Are there safety procedures that make the job harder but not safer?

- Is your personal protective equipment hard to use?

- Which procedures do you see other workers not following (for example, because they make the job harder)?

- How has work changed to make it harder or more dangerous?

- What do you need to get your job done?

- What is the most frustrating thing about your job?

- Have you been surprised by anything on your job lately?

- What is physically challenging on your job?

- What new ideas have workers used to make the job better?

- What ideas do you have about how we can make your job easier, safer, or more productive?

- How can the process or your job be better?

- If you could do one thing to improve work in your area, what would it be?

- If someone were to be hurt here today in your work area, where would it be—on what job?

- If your mother, father, sister, brother, son, or daughter were doing your job, what would you change?