

WALK-AROUNDS FOR SAFETY OFFICERS



This fact sheet provides guidance on conducting workplace safety inspections for safety officers and other workers who are assigned responsibility for safety, but do so in addition to their regular assignments. Workplace inspections are an important tool for identifying hazards and resolving them. Set up a schedule to inspect the workplace on a regular basis—perhaps conduct weekly walk-arounds on construction sites and monthly inspections in other types of facilities.

1 PRE-INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Preparation is important prior to starting an inspection. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the workplace and operations, and the hazards that have been previously identified. Be prepared to gather and document additional information from conversations with workers.

Where available, review prior inspection reports, injury and workers compensation records, incident investigation reports, and recent near-miss incidents. Use these to familiarize yourself with the most hazardous work areas, tasks, or activities. Focus your inspections on areas where hazards have been identified. Check to see if previously identified hazards have been abated or if further action is needed.



Gather workplace inspection checklists from the internet or other published sources. These can provide an organizing framework for your inspection. OSHA's Small Business Handbook (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/smallbusiness/small-business.html>) contains self-inspection checklists addressing many general industry hazards, and OSHA's Construction Pocket Guide (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3252.pdf>) contains checklists for construction.

Internet searches for safety checklists will yield many other options. Choose those that are appropriate for your workplace and are best able to facilitate your inspection activities. Check the internet sites of trade associations that represent your industry to obtain industry-specific checklists that can help best identify the common hazards.

Review the checklists you have found, pick the best items for your workplace, and modify them as needed. After you have conducted a few inspections, you may want to develop more tailored checklists for different areas of the facility.

Determine what personal protective equipment (PPE) you will need to conduct inspections in all areas. As a collateral duty safety officer, it is important that you lead by example and be prepared to use all necessary PPE, be aware of any posted safety warning signs, and follow safety procedures when you are conducting the inspection. Be safe; don't expose yourself to hazards during an inspection.

2 ONSITE INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

The goal of workplace inspections is to develop a comprehensive list of hazards and to prioritize them for control. The strategies for achieving this goal recognize the reality that no single person is capable of identifying all hazards or determining appropriate controls. When you develop relationships and build trust with workers, the chances of success in preventing injuries, illnesses, and fatalities will increase.

For fixed worksites, such as a manufacturing facility, one effective method for conducting a wall-to-wall inspection is to start at the receiving area where materials enter, follow the materials through the process, and finish the inspection at the shipping department. This approach ensures that no area of the plant is missed. For other types of workplaces, such as offices and retail establishments, consider the layout and develop a plan that ensures that each work area is inspected.

Start with easily identifiable hazards, such as:

- Tripping hazards
- Blocked exit
- Frayed/exposed electrical wires
- Missing machine guards
- Poor housekeeping
- Poorly maintained equipment

Look for property damage, such as walls or doors damaged by equipment or forklift traffic, which can indicate potential future injuries. If possible, try to work with the supervisor and workers near the hazard to resolve the problem on the spot.

Talk to workers. Workers are likely to know the most about the hazards and safety issues in their jobs. Tap into that knowledge. Make them comfortable talking with you. Build personal relationships wherever possible. Assure them that you are interested in finding problems and fixing them (i.e., improving safety, not blaming anyone for your findings). Avoid asking yes/no questions; rather, encourage conversation.

Ask open-ended questions such as:

- *What is the most hazardous task in your job? What makes it hazardous?*
- *If you have been injured on your job, what was the injury and how did it happen? What was done to make your job safer?*
- *How would you report an injury, hazard, or near-miss?*

Seek out and talk to the most recent hires to get their perspective on safety. These “fresh eyes” could have valuable insights. Observe workers as they perform their job. Do they lift heavy objects? Do they stand/sit in awkward postures? Are they performing repetitive motions? Checklists are available to help evaluate ergonomic issues.

If you encounter more complex hazards, recognize that you may need assistance. Hazards such as the following should be evaluated by a safety professional or industrial hygienist:

- Chemical hazards such as solvents, welding fumes, or toxic dust
- Noise exposure (areas where you need to raise your voice to be heard)
- Excessive heat
- Accumulations of combustible dust

3 POST-INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Following the inspection, prioritize the hazards based on the severity of the potential injury and the probability that an injury might occur. Use a risk assessment matrix (see table above) or other system to prioritize, track, and follow up on hazards. The highest priority hazards are those that have a high probability of occurring and have the potential for the most serious outcomes.

For example, minor cuts or abrasions that happen only occasionally would be low priority. However, if they are likely to occur repeatedly, such hazards would merit a higher priority. If an exposure to a hazard is improbable, but could result in a catastrophic outcome (such as a worker’s death or injury of a large number of workers), it should not be a low priority.

Of course, it also makes sense to fix easily controlled hazards in order to get them off the list quickly. Share the list of hazards with management, along with an estimate of what is involved in fixing them. Schedule time to go through the list so that they understand the problem, and how it could affect operations if not addressed. Use this opportunity to secure their commitment to provide the resources needed to fix any hazards.

EXAMPLE OF A HAZARD PRIORITIZATION MATRIX				
LIKELIHOOD OF OCCURENCE OR EXPOSURE	SEVERITY OF INJURY OR ILLNESS CONSEQUENCE			
	Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Frequent	Medium	Serious	High	High
Probable	Medium	Serious	High	High
Occasional	Low	Medium	Serious	High
Remote	Low	Medium	Medium	Serious
Improbable	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Source: ANSI/AIHA Z-10 2012 (modified)