

Joint Union-Management Worksite Inspections

The primary purpose of the joint worksite inspection is to identify health and safety hazards in order to rectify them before injuries or illnesses can occur.

- An inspection process should be structured to permit a free exchange of information with respect for the concerns of all parties involved. If this is not the case, the inspection is unlikely to succeed in preventing or reducing work-related injuries and illnesses.
- Employer and union participants in the inspection must be committed to addressing and resolving identified hazards. Employer participants must have the capability to address and resolve identified hazards. If commitment and capability are lacking, the inspection process will not produce effective results.

Step 1: Union caucus

Union participants caucus to discuss strategies and priorities for the inspection. (Union reps should caucus again after the inspection and/or the closing conference.)

Step 2: Opening conference

Employer and union representatives meet *before* the actual walk-around inspection begins. In the opening conference, the parties review existing programs and policies, look at injury and illness data, and generally prepare for the walk-around.

- Prioritize the areas to be inspected. In choosing areas, consider accident and illness rates, incidents, and complaints and concerns.
- Limit each inspection to an area small enough to be inspected thoroughly during the available time. Allow several hours for the inspection.
- Review prior reports and determine whether prior report recommendations have been implemented.
- Be familiar with regulations, policies, engineering controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment that relate to known hazards in the inspection areas.

Step 3: Walk-around inspection

The inspection should be performed during normal working hours while employees are engaged in their normal day-to-day activities. If the employees are not around, the inspectors can't talk to them and important problems could be missed.

- Have on hand any sampling devices which you are trained to use, such as noise level meters or chemical indicator tubes.
- Interview workers from the area (rather than limiting the inspection to what you observe). This way you'll get a better and more current idea what to look at.
- If possible, use a camera to record information.
- For each apparent violation or hazard, establish and record as much of the following information as appropriate and feasible:
 - What is the exact location of the hazard? If appropriate, record a map or sketch of the area.
 - List relevant measurements, estimates, and assessments. Observe and record any obvious signs of exposure, such as airborne dust, smoke or mist, accumulations of dust or grease on horizontal surfaces, loud noise, heat, cold, vibration or stress.
 - How long has the condition existed, whether it had been discussed previously with management, and if so, what action was taken and when?
 - Are there workforce suggestions for correcting the hazardous condition?
 - How did the hazardous condition occur?
 - How many workers are exposed to the hazard? Indicate which job titles are exposed and how often they are exposed.
 - How has the hierarchy of controls been applied to the hazard?
 - Has anyone been injured or nearly injured? Has anyone been ill?
 - Record thoughts on how to resolve the hazard, taking into account the hierarchy of controls.

Ideally, inspections should be conducted once a month. Regardless of the schedule for inspections, the worksite should be reinspected whenever there is a change in work methods, processes or in the chemicals and tools used.

A checklist can be very helpful in conducting the worksite inspection. However, be aware that checklists do not cover all hazards and all situations.

Step 4: Closing conference

Employer and union representatives meet immediately after the walk-around. Review inspection findings. Combine the notes of all inspection participants into one report and summarize hazards requiring follow-up.

Prioritize the hazards in terms of seriousness and number of workers affected. Develop strategies and timelines for correcting both high- and low-priority hazards and a method for documenting progress. Correction of unsafe conditions and improvements in safety and health programs should be agreed upon during this conference, responsibilities assigned, and completion dates set.

- Set date and location for next inspection.
- Inform the workforce and upper management of the results of the inspection.

Sources:

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Worksite Inspections: Union Representatives as Detectives.

New Jersey Department of Health, Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Program.

