

## SAFETY WALK-AROUNDS FOR MANAGERS

This fact sheet provides guidance to help managers and business owners conduct safety walkarounds to identify hazards in the workplace and communicate with workers about hazards in their jobs.

There are at least two reasons why managers and owners should periodically conduct workplace inspections themselves. First, inspections demonstrate management's commitment to improving safety and health by finding and fixing hazards. Second, walk-arounds let managers see for themselves how the safety and health program is working and whether it is effective in identifying and eliminating hazards. Safety walk-arounds can also help managers and owners assess how key elements of the safety program are working. For example, how engaged are workers in the program? Do workers feel they have received appropriate training? Do they know how to report a safety or health incident or concern?

### 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. Pre-inspection activities might include:

- Identify the most hazardous areas by examining past inspection reports, injury and workers compensation records, incident investigation reports, and recent near-miss incidents. Plan to focus your inspections on areas where hazards have been identified and check to see if previously-identified hazards have been abated or if further action is needed.
- Talk to workplace safety representatives and other managers or supervisors about their safety observations and concerns.
- If the workplace has a safety committee, meet with the committee prior to the inspection to get their perspective on the most important safety issues.
- Determine what safety equipment you will need to conduct the inspection.
- It is important to lead by example, and wearing the right personal protective equipment (PPE) sets a good example. Practice wearing the PPE to

make sure you know how to put it on properly, and that it fits.

- Consider taking the same hazard identification safety training taken by workers, managers, or the safety committee.

### On-Site Inspection Activities

When on-site, make sure you are wearing the right PPE for each area you enter. Nothing takes away credibility faster than having the wrong PPE or not wearing it properly. Be safe; don't expose yourself to hazards during an inspection.

Limit the size of the inspection group. Large groups tend to stifle open communication with workers.

Look for easily observable hazards first, such as:

- Tripping hazards
- Blocked exits
- 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. Such damage may indicate a potential for future worker injuries.

Talk to workers at their work stations. 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. Assure them that you are interested in finding problems and fixing them, i.e., improving safety, not blaming anyone for your findings. Avoid yes/no questions. 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 in 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 recently-hired workers to get their perspective on safety. These “fresh eyes” could have valuable insights.

Observe workers as they perform their job. For example, do they lift heavy objects? Do they stand/sit in awkward postures? Are they performing repetitive motions? If so, take notes and photos. If their job involves handling chemicals or exposure to excessive noise and/or heat, a more detailed evaluation by a safety professional may be in order.

Try to find solutions for hazards while you are conducting the inspection by applying your own creativity and inspiring the creativity of workers.

Finding solutions “on the spot” demonstrates your commitment to making the workplace safer.

Prior to completing the inspection, make a list of hazards that need to be addressed and prioritize them according to the severity of the potential injuries that might occur as a result of workers being exposed to the hazards.

## Post-Inspection Activities

Post-inspection follow-up is important to establishing your credibility as a manager who is committed to improving safety. Failure to follow up can often stifle worker participation and enthusiasm, which can be hard to regain.

Very soon after your inspection, prepare an abatement plan containing a list of the hazards found, corrective actions needed, and a reasonable timeline for implementation. Some complex hazards may require further evaluation, study, or engineering work to design and implement appropriate controls. Describe briefly how the hazards will be addressed and identify interim controls that will be used while more permanent measures are developed.

Share the abatement plan with managers, supervisors, and workers as a way of showing your commitment to fixing the safety issues found during your inspection. Track progress by sharing or posting periodic updates to the plan. Ensure all corrective actions are implemented in a timely fashion.



## 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.

### 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/OSHA3252/3252.html>) 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.

### On-Site 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)

Example of a Hazard Prioritization Matrix				
Likelihood of Occurrence 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)

- Excessive heat
- Accumulations of combustible dust

## 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.