GUIDELINE

WORKPLACE INSPECTIONS

An inspection is a monitoring function conducted in an organization to locate and report existing and potential hazards that can lead to accidents in the workplace.

WHY INSPECT?

1. To Prevent Accidents

The purpose of workplace inspections is to ensure that any potential or actual dangers in the workplace are found and corrected before they cause accidents and injuries to employees and others. Accident prevention is a fundamental component in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace, contributing to increased worker morale and decreased worker injury and/or absenteeism.

2. To Meet Legal Requirements

For JHSC Members:

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*, Section 9 (23) to (30), the worker members of the workplace Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) must inspect the workplace at least once per year (with different parts of the workplace each month). It is important to note that the duty identified in Section 9 to do a workplace inspection rests on the shoulders of the worker representative on the JHSC. There is no duty on the part of the employer to perform an inspection under Section 9. The question must be asked whether the inspection done by the worker representative is enough.

For Employers and Supervisors:

In Section 25 (2h) of the *OSHA*, it indicates that the employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker. In addition, Section 27 (2a) requires a supervisor to advise a worker of the existence of any potential or actual danger. In order to meet these requirements, supervisors need to inspect workplaces to identify potential hazards such as faulty or inappropriate equipment, structural problems, unsafe work practices, etc. They must then take corrective action so that these hazards will not result in injuries to workers.

How can an employer advise employees of potential hazards in the workplace unless an inspection of the workplace has been done?

3. To Improve Operation Efficiency, Productivity and Worker Morale

In many cases, actions taken to eliminate workplace hazards improve work efficiency, productivity and worker morale. For example, placing an ergonomic floor mat at an assembly line workstation eases the pain and fatigue of the worker over an eight-hour shift, leading to less down time – a clear benefit for both the worker and the employer.
TYPES OF INSPECTIONS

1. Formal

Formal planned inspections are performed at set intervals, such as monthly or annually. A formal workplace inspection involves planning the proper inspection schedule and route, developing a checklist, and documenting the inspection and findings. The more time that is devoted up front in this planning, the more time that is saved on an ongoing basis.

2. Pre-operational Inspections

Certain operations or equipment require pre-operational inspections (e.g., circle check that is performed on lift trucks and service vehicles at the start of each work shift). This type of inspection requires supervisors and workers to conduct regular and ongoing inspections as part of their job responsibilities. Such inspections identify hazardous conditions and either correct them immediately or report them for further corrective action.

Pre-operational checks are also required for every new or modified process or piece of equipment. Often these are done after workplace shutdowns.

3. Periodic Inspections

Other operations or equipment require periodic inspections (e.g., inspecting a first aid kit every three months to ensure contents are fully stocked). This type of inspection also requires supervisors and workers to conduct regular and ongoing inspections as part of their job responsibilities.

The frequency of these inspections (e.g., weekly, etc.) varies with the type of facilities or equipment being used. Daily checks by users assure that the equipment meets minimum acceptable safety requirements prior to operation.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN INSPECTION

1. Develop a Checklist

Checklists are very valuable in an inspection program. They serve as reminders for what to look for and as records of what has been inspected. They also help to establish a record of due diligence on the part of supervisors and employers. Appropriate checklists should be developed to suit the particular circumstances (e.g., offices, laboratories, plants, etc.) of the workplace.

2. Determine an Inspection Schedule

The frequency of inspections is determined by four factors:

*What is the loss severity potential of the problem?* If a part failed, what injury severity or severity of work interruption would result? The greater the loss severity, the more often the item should be inspected.
What is the potential for injury to employees? The greater the probability for injury to employees, the more often the item or practice should be inspected (e.g., needle stick injuries, operating presses, etc.).

How quickly can the part or item become unsafe? The answer to this question depends on the nature of the part and the conditions to which it is subjected. Equipment and tools used more frequently can become damaged, defective, or worn more quickly than those rarely used. The faster an item can become unsafe, the more frequently it should be inspected.

What is the past history of incidents? Maintenance, injury, and incident reports can provide valuable information about how frequently items have failed and the frequency of past injuries and damages. The more often an item has caused incidents, the more it needs to be inspected.

3. Determine an Inspection Route

Choosing an appropriate inspection route will facilitate an effective and thorough inspection while avoiding:

- Time-consuming backtracking and repetitions;
- Long walks between items;
- Unnecessary interruptions of work; and
- Distraction of employees.

4. Select an Inspector

An inspection can be performed by one person alone, such as a supervisor, or in the presence of another person, such as a health and safety officer, manager, or someone from another department who is trained in workplace inspections. The inspector(s) should try to obtain input from workers while performing the inspection.

5. Document Observations

Every inspection should be documented (e.g., by completing a checklist). One strategy is review previous reports to identify items that were noted during the last inspection. Each hazard observed should be described and its location identified. Corrective action should be recommended and a response date established. Examples of workplace inspection forms are appended to this document.

If the completed inspection form is to be distributed widely, document unsafe work practices and potential or actual dangers without specifying the names of people involved. Use statements such as, "a worker was observed operating a machine without a guard" or “books are unevenly loaded in room 013 – occupant has been asked to reorganize books.”

Document physical hazards as well as unsafe work practices. Some common poor work practices include:
• Operating at unsafe speeds
• Operating equipment or machinery without safety guards
• Failing to use personal protective equipment
• Using defective tools or equipment or using tools or equipment in unsafe ways
• Using hands or body instead of tools or push sticks
• Improper material handling such as improper lifting or overloading, crowding, or failing to balance materials or handling materials in other unsafe ways
• Repairing or adjusting equipment that is in motion, under pressure, or electrically charged
• Using compressed air for cleaning clothes
• Poor housekeeping
• Smoking around flammable materials
• Standing or working under suspended loads, scaffolds, shafts, or open hatches

Some potential hazards commonly found in offices, laboratories and other work environments are listed on the DOHS Safety Notices web page: [http://www.yorku.ca/dohs/safetynotices.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/dohs/safetynotices.htm).

6. **Provide Recommendations**

   It is important to provide clear recommendations stemming from an inspection. It is one thing to know what the problems are; it is another thing to ensure that they are actually addressed and corrected. To facilitate the follow up of recommendations, the inspector should be as clear and specific as possible (within the text of the inspection checklist and/or in any other correspondence) regarding what type of corrective action is required, who is responsible for taking corrective action and by what deadline. This ensures accountability on the part of all involved.

7. **Initiate Corrective Action**

   Corrective action that is required should be clearly described, delegated and assigned a deadline. Any problems found that pose an immediate danger to employees or others should be immediately addressed with corrective action. Documentation should include any steps that are taken, even if minor.
INSPECTION PRINCIPLES

When conducting inspections, follow these basic principles:

- Draw attention to the presence of any immediate danger and act to correct them (even if it is only a temporarily corrective measure until a permanent correction can be made) – other items can await the final report.
- Shut down and "lock out" any hazardous items that cannot be brought to a safe operating standard until repaired.
- Do not operate equipment. Ask the operator for a demonstration. Take note of any potential or actual hazards that the operator is aware of. Never ignore any item because you do not have knowledge to make an accurate judgement of safety.
- Look up, down, around, and inside, using all your senses to identify problems. Be methodical and thorough. Do not spoil the inspection with a "once-over-lightly" approach.
- Clearly describe each hazard and its exact location in your notes. Allow "on-the-spot" recording of all findings before they are forgotten. Record what you have or have not examined in case the inspection is interrupted.
- Ask questions without disrupting work activities, if possible. Observe what the workers normally do to avoid creating a potentially hazardous situation by interrupting their work.
- Consider the static (stop position) and dynamic (in motion) conditions of the item you are inspecting. If a machine is shut down and you need to inspect the machine while it is in operation, consider postponing the inspection until it is functioning again.
- Discuss as a group, "Can an accident or injury result from this situation when looking at the equipment, the process or the environment?" Determine what corrections or controls are appropriate.
- Take a photograph if you are unable to clearly describe or sketch a particular situation. Instant or digital photographs are especially useful.