

HOW TO CONDUCT WORKPLACE INSPECTIONS

Workplace Inspections

A workplace inspection is a planned walkthrough of a workplace or selected areas or locations of a workplace. Inspections are needed to critically examine all factors (equipment, processes, materials, buildings, procedures) that have the potential to cause injury or illness, and to identify where action is necessary to control hazards. A schedule of planned inspections is an essential element of a health and safety program in which standards are established and compliance monitored.

Who Should Conduct Inspections?

Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* places responsibility on a worker health and safety representative to conduct an inspection of physical conditions. However, the employer still has the prime responsibility for providing a healthy and safe workplace. The implementation of effective and regular inspections is one way in which an employer's general legal duties may be met. However, a joint inspection, consisting of both management and worker representatives, would be in keeping with the participative approach of the *Act*.

How Often Should Inspections be Conducted?

The worker health and safety representative must inspect the workplace at least once a month. However, if this is not practical, he or she shall inspect the physical condition of the workplace at least once a year, inspecting at least a part of it every month. The inspection must be conducted according to a schedule set by the joint health and safety committee or, in smaller workplaces of 6 to 19 employees, by the employer and health and safety representative. In drawing up the schedule, consider:

- The number of different processes or operations
- Hazardous equipment that must be inspected at set intervals and, in some cases, as determined by legislation (for example, cranes and slings)
- Processes with high hazard potential that may require separate and more frequent inspections
- The number of shifts – inspections should not be confined only to one particular shift because the nature of the activity may vary from one shift to another
- Special inspections whenever a new process or piece of machinery is introduced into the workplace

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Preparing for the Inspection

The success of workplace inspections depends on having the necessary information. There should also be an overall system of management controls which is flexible enough to allow for changes to be made, for example in equipment or work practices, when needed.

To properly identify hazards, the person or persons conducting the inspection should have the necessary training, which should include:

- The plant layout – a floor plan is helpful in preparing for the inspection, and recording findings
- The potential hazards associated with the various machinery, equipment, materials, and processes
- Existing controls, applicable standards and regulations
- How to use the information from:
 - Ministry of Labour inspection reports/orders
 - Results of previous inspections
 - Accident data
 - Maintenance reports

Conducting the Inspection

To ensure that all items are covered during the inspection, it is useful to develop checklists which contain reference, in point form, to all potential hazards. These checklists should never be considered as permanent lists. They should be reviewed and added to or revised as necessary – for example, when machinery or processes are changed or when accident experience reveals previously unsuspected hazards.

Figure 1 is a sample checklist for hazardous materials. In addition to Hazardous Materials, the checklist should include references to the hazards of Equipment and Machinery (tools, machinery and guarding, materials handling equipment) and Physical Factors (floors, exits, lighting, work station layout, task design, noise).

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Recording Observation

It is necessary to review all the information collected and rank each issue in terms of its importance. All identified hazards should be classified A, B, or C, as follows:

Class A Hazard

A condition or practice likely to cause permanent disability, loss of life or body part, and/or extensive loss of structure, equipment or material. For example, an unguarded saw.

Class B Hazard

A condition or practice likely to cause serious injury or illness, resulting in temporary disability or property damage that is disruptive but not extensive. For example, spilled oil on the main aisle.

Class C Hazard

A condition or practice likely to cause minor, non-disabling injury or illness, or nondisruptive property damage. For example, handling solvents without using proper protective gloves.

Although the law does not specify an official reporting form, a good form is valuable in ensuring that management, and others responsible for follow up, are made aware of problems. Such a form can also serve as a valuable reference for spot inspections and periodic checks by the supervisor, as well as for review by the joint health and safety committee. The sample Workplace Inspection Recording Form in Figure 2 is available on our website: www.iapa.ca. It allows for recording observations made during the inspection, as well as for noting recommendations and subsequent corrective actions.

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Figure 1: Sample Checklist for Hazardous Materials

	Observations/Comments
Identification	
<input type="checkbox"/> Containers labelled to meet legal requirements?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Labels easy to read?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Material safety data sheets (MSDSs) available, current and complete?	
Preventive Measures Ventilation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation adequate? (evidence of dust, fumes, etc., may be caused by inadequate or malfunctioning ventilation)	
Handling Procedures and Equipment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Handling procedures adequate and followed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial hygiene facilities provided? (for example, locker rooms, showers, laundry facilities, etc.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eating/drinking on job prohibited where swallowing the material may be a problem?	
<input type="checkbox"/> “No Smoking” signs posted near flammables/combustibles?	
Leaks and Spills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of leaks or spills?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning procedures adequate and followed?	
Waste Disposal	
<input type="checkbox"/> Waste disposal procedures adequate and followed?	
Storage	
<input type="checkbox"/> Storage conditions adequate?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Safety containers for flammable liquids?	
PPE	
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal protective equipment (PPE) adequate and used?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gloves ▪ Respirators ▪ Eye Protection 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Footwear ▪ Other 	

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Figure 2: Workplace Inspection Recording Form

Inspection Location(s): _____

Time of Inspection: _____

Departments/Areas Covered: _____

Date of Inspection: _____

Item (and Location of Item)	Hazards Observed	Hazard Class	Repeat Item		Recommended Action	FOR FOLLOW-UP			Authorized Signature	
			Yes	No		By Whom	When	Action Taken		Completed

Copies To: (For Action): _____

Inspected By: _____

(For Information): _____

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Review/Follow-Up

After each inspection, it is important that the information obtained is given careful consideration and, where indicated, corrective action taken. The results of inspections are indicators of the success or failure of management policies and practices and should be examined for possible changes. Although all identified hazards should ultimately be eliminated or minimized, the responsible supervisor or manager must be informed of hazards posing an immediate danger so that corrective action can be taken quickly.

The information obtained from regular inspections should also be reviewed carefully to identify trends and to help monitor the effectiveness of a company's health and safety program. Over a period of time, this review will help:

- Highlight the need for training in certain areas
- Provide insight as to why accidents are occurring in certain areas;
- Establish priorities for corrective action
- Establish or improve safe work practices
- Indicate areas, equipment, etc., which may require more in-depth hazard analysis

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