
WORKERS' COMPENSATION HOW-TO GUIDE

Safety Inspections

REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE A KID AND THE COMIC BOOK ASKED YOU TO 'FIND THE HIDDEN OBJECTS IN THIS SCENE'.

The objects were there, often disguised within the leaves of trees and bushes, and you had to look hard to find them. At first, you saw only the big picture. But with concentration, hidden objects finally came into focus because you were looking for them.

We tend to see what we focus upon. A good supervisor looks for both superior production activity and a safe working environment—two important responsibilities. But safety hazards sometimes go unnoticed, either because you forget to look for them or because they become lost in the larger picture of production. Sometimes, supervisors lack information and training in the techniques of safety inspection. Preventing injuries should be an internal process, and it has to be planned and scheduled. It's not enough just to keep your eye out for dangers. You need to set aside time to focus on the work environment, and view your workers and the environment with “new eyes”. Your goal is to find and eliminate possible sources of danger.

WHY THE BUSY SUPERVISOR?

Shouldn't the safety committee or safety director take care of inspections? A supervisor's job is to see that the work gets done! This is exactly the point. Supervisors should observe the work process and methods all the time, so who is better suited to identify and correct unsafe acts and conditions? Safety committees and the safety director can help, but the ultimate responsibility for the crew's safety lies with the supervisor on a daily basis. Incidents and injuries mean pain and suffering, reduced staff morale, increased employee turnover, down time, disrupted schedules, and financial loss from both direct and indirect costs. The job goes much smoother when none of these happen. There is a lot to gain from being a safety sleuth.

LOOK FOR PEOPLE OR THINGS?

Work environments are generally safer than in the past, due to modern building and equipment codes, as well as safety standards and regulations that have evolved over the years. But nothing can be taken for granted. Every hazard in new industries or equipment may not have been discovered. Special projects can have unique jobsite conditions with dangers no one anticipated. The entire workplace environment should be viewed from a critical “What if...?” standpoint on a regular basis, before the work begins. Supervisors should seek out possible worst-case scenarios, and be sure they are avoided.

Many supervisors find it easier to inspect “things” rather than to observe employee work practices. Humans, however, are often at the root of safety problems. Over 90% of all serious injuries are believed to be caused by unsafe acts and poor work practices. Some people can become careless, hasty, distracted or fatigued. Poor attitudes, poor choices and bad habits leave workers wide open to incidents and injuries, even if the environment is basically safe. Little is gained if safe work practices are established, but are not monitored and enforced. Who else but supervisors should perform inspections? Here is how to begin.

PLAN AND PRIORITIZE THE HAZARD HUNT

1. Look At History

What kinds of incidents and injuries have taken place in your company, and especially in your own operation, during the past year? Knowing this can help you focus your time and attention on conditions and behaviors that have the greatest probability of occurring. Review insurance loss runs, incident investigation reports, and your OSHA 300 logs. Look for patterns in the type, cause, body parts injured, time of day, etc.

2. Be Familiar with Safety and Health Codes

Knowledge of safety standards helps you anticipate and avoid known and potentially dangerous situations. But who can know all the safety codes? Keep the codebooks handy, and know how to look things up, but concentrate on thoroughly learning those standards that are relevant to the source of your losses and operations. Use resources available to you such as your safety committee and safety directory, if applicable.

3. Review Job Hazard Analysis (JHAs)

Chances are any JHAs that have been done in the past involve high-risk tasks. This analysis not only pinpoints the hazards, it highlights the prevention strategies that should be in place. Make good use of JHAs, or develop them. They have real value.

4. Know Workers

Do any employees tend to be lax about safety standards? Which groups seem to have poor production or low morale? Which individuals tend to work carelessly, are always rushing, or have repeated incidents? These clues will suggest which employees are likely to have mishaps. Make personal safety contacts to check out these matters. This is often more important than looking for “things.”

5. Allocate Inspection Time

Spend more time in locations of the work environment where known hazards exist, where past incidents have taken place, or where you anticipate issues. All areas of the operation probably do not warrant the same amount of time and attention. Prioritize your focus.

6. Varied Inspection Schedule

If you are responsible for a large operation, sample conditions in one or more smaller sections periodically, rather than trying to survey the entire area every time. Some sections or work groups may deserve attention frequently, others only now and then.

DO A BETTER JOB WITH A CHECKLIST

An appropriate checklist provides focus at the beginning of a hazard hunt and gives a sense of closure when you finish. Inspection checklists come in many forms and serve many functions, such as:

- A reminder of what to look for;
- A record of what has and has not been inspected;
- An on-the-spot recording of all findings;
- A record of issues to share with management or the safety committee;
- Information for follow-up corrective action;
- Documentation showing your company strives to provide a safe environment for employees.

CHOOSE HAZARD HUNTING TOOLS

Customized Checklists

It's easy to find a specific safety checklist for a shop, yard, office, warehouse, etc. Checklists for vehicles or heavy equipment may focus on daily or weekly maintenance needs. Even the complicated operations on a construction site can be categorized on inspection forms to make a huge task manageable. Once you've analyzed the hazards in your operation, you'll know which checklists will be most useful for you. Customized checklists are efficient because they do part of the thinking for you—the part that says, “Now, what is I'm looking for?” When you're finished, you'll feel more confident that your sleuthing has covered all the bases, and you can move on to other important aspects of your job. A sample shop safety checklist is included at the end of this article as an example.

Area Inspection Forms

These often consist of one column for the work area or location being observed, one column for what unsafe act or condition was seen, and a third column for comments or needed actions. Simple forms are often most appealing, since they seem to be easier to work with. The problem is they usually don't list specific things to look for. If you become distracted or interrupted during the walk-around, you may forget what you've observed. Remember, like the hidden objects in the picture, some hazards are easily overlooked. A sample area safety inspection form is included at the end of this article.

Scoring Systems:

Many checklists provide a place to record Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory, or Not Applicable conditions, including room for comments or action items. A few of these use a more complex scoring system, so results of safety inspections can be monitored over time or compared with other divisions of the company. For example, if housekeeping, machinery guards or tool storage conditions are found to be poor, they might be graded #1; whereas if conditions are found to be excellent, they would be graded a #5. The most favorable surveys would show high scores, while the lower scores might be cause for corrective actions and more frequent inspections.

MAKE IT A HUNTING PARTY

Just as a company's safety director can't be a one-person safety program, supervisors need not do all the inspections single-handedly. Group efforts not only provide more "eyes," but they make more of an impression on the workforce. Consider inviting a manager or division head to do a walk-

around with you now and then. Select one or two employees to go with you, as a break from their normal routine, and rotate who is chosen to participate. Point out unsafe acts and conditions, and show how they could lead to injuries. Suggest ways those unsafe acts could be prevented. Discuss whether more safety training is needed.

It may be more efficient to divide up areas that need to be surveyed and let different people concentrate on different territories or focus upon specific types of hazards. It's usually best if two or more people work together. If you let your crew members fill out the checklists, they'll learn what to look for, and perhaps discover ways to make your checklists more complete. Hazard hunting can be a learning experience for everyone.

NEVER LET A SAFETY HAZARD PASS!

Always see that immediate action is taken when a safety violation or hazardous situation exists. If the situation cannot be corrected until a future time, be sure that employees are guarded from the exposure. Delegate corrective action and set a deadline for completion.

FOLLOW UP ON SUGGESTIONS AND ACTION ITEMS

Employees may not be motivated to correct unsafe work practices unless they know their supervisor will check back. Tell them you will do so, and make a note to yourself as a reminder. If you've asked workers to report hazards or make safety suggestions, be sure to thoroughly review and consider these suggestions or they'll stop making them. If nothing can be done about their ideas, they deserve to know the reason why.

NEVER MISS A CHANCE TO GIVE PRAISE

A hazard hunt gives you a chance to praise workers for favorable conditions, as well as to identify hazards. The goal is not to find fault and establish blame. The more you can bring employees into the problem solving process by asking what hazards they face and how they deal with them, the more they become committed to finding solutions. Most importantly, catch people doing things right as often as possible.

GET IN TOUCH

If you would like to know more about new Employee Safety Orientation for your workplace you can contact your local Core Specialty Workers' Compensation representative.

corespecialtyinsurance.com

This material is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal, regulatory or risk management advice, nor are any suggested checklists or actions plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions specific to your organization. In providing these forms, Core Specialty does not represent, warrant, guarantee or otherwise certify that the use of these materials will prevent losses or assure compliance with laws, regulations, requirements or guidelines of any local, state or federal agency.

(Sample-Customize for your operations)

SHOP SAFETY INSPECTION*

Inspector(s)

Site

Date

1. Stairs clean, free of grease and stored items?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Exits and aisles clear of debris and obstacles?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Proper waste containers for flammable or combustible liquids and materials?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Adequate storage areas for all materials, including flammables?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Outside storage areas in proper condition?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Power tools in proper condition and grounded or double insulated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Power cords in good repair, not spliced or frayed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Electrical switches & circuit breakers labeled and adequately covered?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Illumination adequate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
10. Ventilation adequate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
11. Sanitation adequate, e.g. bathroom, eating areas?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
12. First aid supplies complete and accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
13. Emergency eyewashes available, tested and easily accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
14. Fire extinguishers provided in adequate number and type?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
15. Fire extinguishers adequately mounted and serviced annually?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
16. Parts washers equipped with fusible links in lids?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
17. Face shields, goggles & safety glasses provided and in good condition?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
18. Protective gloves, aprons, etc. provided for work with hazardous chemicals?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
19. Hearing protection provided and required in noisy areas?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
20. Grinders and shop saws equipped with adequate guards and shields?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
21. Spare Oxy/acetylene bottles chained/separated by 20' or at least a 1/2-hour fire barrier?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
22. Backflow preventers in place on cutting torch or manifold?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
23. Bridge crane capacity posted; safety latches on hooks?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
24. Safety rules consistently enforced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

*COMMENTS/CORRECTIVE ACTION ASSIGNED: (Use reverse side for additional notes)

(Sample-Customize for your operations)

AREA SAFETY INSPECTION

Work Area or Location	Unsafe Acts or Conditions	Comments or Needed Actions

General Comments

Inspector(s)

Date
