Conducting Workplace Safety Inspections



Are you regularly doing scheduled workplace inspections? If you're not, you should be and now is a great time to start. Workplace inspections give you a chance to thoroughly evaluate equipment, processes, tasks, tools, and other factors. Regular inspections help you find new hazards, see how existing hazard controls are working, correct or fix issues, and implement new controls (engineering, administrative, PPE) where needed.

Step 1: Decide on Frequency

Regularly inspect operations, equipment, work areas, and facilitates. Frequency requirements can vary between provincial, federal, state, and local regulations (and company requirements), but once a month is a common best practice and a common requirement. If monthly inspections aren't possible, it is recommended to focus on one or two areas, types of equipment, processes, or tasks a month – and do a full inspection annually.

Step 2: Identify Who Will Perform the Inspections

Often, it is the safety committee's job to conduct inspections, but have members of management and workers who are familiar with an area, process, or task do regular inspections too.

When determining both the frequency of inspections and who will be performing the inspections, think about the number and types of processes that will be inspected. Review regulatory requirements for equipment such as cranes and fall protection and high hazard activities or processes that require qualified, experienced, and trained personnel perform the inspection. And don't forget about covering all shifts and who will perform inspections on these shifts.

Step 3: Prepare

Make the most of an inspection by taking time to plan and prepare. First, review incident and near miss data to look for trends and hazards. Gather floorplans or layouts of the space and any checklists to be used.

Then, look at past inspections for what hazards were identified and what corrective action was/should have been taken. Gather information on potential hazards – i.e. machines, equipment, materials, areas, tasks, and processes.

Brush up on regulatory requirements too.

Next, make sure you've got the right checklist/s for the areas, machinery, or processes being inspected. Note: update checklists as conditions change – new equipment, new hazards, hazards that have been removed, etc.

Finally, don't forget PPE for every member of the inspection team.

Step 4: Inspect

Be familiar with common hazard sources, including objects (tools, equipment, containers); activities (driving, lifting, digging, welding, sorting and filling containers); and locations (floors, stairwells, confined spaces, excavations, workstations). Determine and discuss the inspection route, put on your PPE, and start the inspection. Take notes on what you observe and use those notes, your checklists, and floorplans to document your findings.

Look for deviations from accepted safe work practices such as: equipment missing guards; LOTO procedures not being followed; poor housekeeping; using tools and equipment without proper training or authority and using damaged tools or equipment.

Stop any work that puts workers in immediate danger and don't allow work to begin again until the hazard is fixed. Lastly, don't create a hazard by operating equipment – ask the operator to demonstrate.

Step 5: Write a Report

Put together all the findings, including corrective action plans, into a final report. Be as detailed and specific as possible – using location, equipment name/type, process and what part of the process presents a hazard. Then prioritize which hazards require urgent or immediate fixes. Here's an example of a system you could use:

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. Requires immediate action.

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. Requires short-term action.

Class C Hazard: A condition or practice likely to cause minor, non-disabling injury or illness, or nondisruptive property damage. Requires a long-term fix.

Step 6: Follow-Up and Review

Inspections are a great tool for showing you which policies and practices are working and which ones need follow-up and revision. Reviewing available inspection data can help identify trends and situations where training is needed; uncover the reason for an injury trend; and determine which equipment, processes, or work areas need further investigation.