

In-House Inspections Crucial to a Safe Workplace

When was the last time you or the person responsible for doing so walked around your facility, warehouse, office or other workplace and did a safety inspection?

Your Injury and Illness Prevention Program should state that the owner, supervisor or person with authority and responsibility shall conduct monthly workplace safety inspections.

To maintain a safe and healthful workplace, OSHA requires that you use the safety standard to help identify hazards that exist now or could develop.

You are also required to indicate the frequency of inspections and identify the person responsible for conducting them and correcting unsafe conditions in all work areas.

You will want to conduct inspections whenever new substances, processes, procedures or equipment are introduced into the workplace and represent a new occupational safety and health hazard.

Use your own experience to develop a hazard inspection checklist for your facility. The items should be specific and clear enough so that anyone in your workplace can check the items listed. Make copies, so a new list does not have to be made.

Keep records of all inspections, findings, accidents and recommendations and communicate with your employees. Keep these records for a minimum of three years.

You should look at all times for possible hazards, but a complete facility check should be done monthly.

With a busy workplace, employers and employees tend to overlook hazards but with monthly inspections and corrections, accidents will be prevented.

These inspections can help you ferret out issues that may have just come up, or carelessness by an employee that would otherwise go unnoticed.

What to look for

Here are some of the key things to look for in a walk-around inspection:

- Are employer postings in a prominent place, so all employees are likely to see them, and are the posters the latest revisions? Are telephone numbers, safety data sheets, first aid kits, exits and warning signs posted in their appropriate places?
- Do you have an active safety program, are employees familiar with the program, and is it updated?

- Are first aid kits easily accessible to each work area, with necessary supplies available and replenished?
- Are fire extinguishers mounted, unobstructed, signs posted and an adequate number for the workplace?
- Are all workstations clean, sanitary and orderly? Are changes in elevation indicated by signs or painted areas?
- Are exits marked with an exit sign, and non-exits marked accordingly? Are exits free of obstructions, and unlocked during business hours?
- Are electrical panels clear of obstructions, breakers marked in relation to what they serve, and panel doors closed?

These are just a few of the items that need to be checked daily and monthly.

The takeaway

Once you have completed your inspection, correct all hazards that you identify immediately.

Discuss your findings at your next safety meetings, and how they could have caused an injury in the workplace. Also discuss how to avoid future safety lapses and reiterate best safety practices for all areas identified.

Involve your employees in the discussion. Encourage them to point out any other safety issues and to make recommendations on how to make the workplace safer.

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