

How to Conduct Workplace Inspections

What is a Workplace Inspection?

A workplace inspection is a planned walk-through 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.

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).

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 non-disruptive 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.

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.

Resource Materials

- Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations for Industrial Establishments LPMA0010201
- Joint Health & Safety Committee Kit LPKA0090309
- Inspecting Physical Conditions: Guidelines for Setting Standards LPBA0140410
- Joint Health & Safety Committees (one day training program)

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Figure 1

Sample Checklist for Hazardous Materials

	Observations/Comments
Identification	
☐ Containers labelled to meet legal requirements?	_____
☐ Labels easy to read?	_____
☐ Material safety data sheets (MSDSs) available, Current and complete?	_____
Preventive Measures Ventilation	
☐ Ventilation adequate? (Evidence of dust, fumes, etc. may be caused by inadequate or malfunction ventilation.)	_____
Handling Procedures and Equipment	
☐ Handling procedures adequate and followed?	_____
☐ Industrial hygiene facilities provided? (for example, locker rooms, showers, laundry facilities, etc.)	_____
☐ Eating/drinking on job prohibited where swallowing the material may be a problem?	_____
☐ "No Smoking" signs posted near flammables/combustibles?	_____
Leaks and Spills	
☐ Evidence of leaks or spills?	_____
☐ Cleaning procedures adequate and followed?	_____
Waste Disposal	
☐ Waste disposal procedures adequate and followed?	_____
Storage	
☐ Storage conditions adequate?	_____
☐ Safety containers for flammable liquids?	_____
PPE	
☐ Personal protective equipment (PPE) adequate and used?	
- Gloves	_____
- Respirators	_____
- Eye Protection	_____
- Footwear	_____
- Other	_____

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						
			YES	NO		BY WHOM	WHEN	ACTION TAKEN	COMPLETED	AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE		

COPIES TO: (FOR ACTION): _____ INSPECTED BY: _____
(FOR INFORMATION): _____

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While IAPA does not undertake to provide a revision service or guarantee accuracy, we shall be pleased to respond to your individual requests for information.

Revised: May 2006

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