

## Workplace Safety – General Industry

### Developing and Implementing Workplace Self Inspection Checklists

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A self-inspection program is not only about making sure your organization is in compliance with federal and/or state regulations but also for identifying unsafe acts and conditions so that workers, guests and visitors do not become injured. A self-inspection program is critical to ensuring a safe work environment for everyone who works at and visits your facility. One caveat, or word of caution—the self-inspection process only captures a moment in time of your workplace. There may be infrequent or rare processes or procedures that the person or group conducting the inspections may never see. The self-inspection process is only one facet of a comprehensive safety program.

The first step in a self-inspection program is assigning responsibility to someone in your organization for the program. This person will need to have the authority to affect change in the workplace and would most likely be a Facilities or Human Resources person. The designated person must be trained in hazard recognition and know the types of hazards to look for that correlate with your facility's operations.

The next step is to determine how often to conduct the inspections. Consider whether or not inspections should be a scheduled event, conducted as a surprise, or staggered at different times during the day. Keep in mind that facility operations and activities are often different at various times throughout the work day. You may want to consider implementing a two-tiered approach: weekly or monthly walk-throughs at the facility level performed by facility personnel and then a more extensive audit walk-through performed by corporate representation either quarterly or semi-annually.

One of the best ways to perform a self-inspection is by using a checklist. The checklist is a valuable tool because it outlines specific items to check for that will not be forgotten or overlooked if conducted by memory. The checklist also provides written documentation, which is extremely important to government entities such as state and federal OSHA.

The checklist should be meaningful and tailored to your organization's operations. For example, don't include bench grinders on the checklist if they are not part of your operations. The checklist should include unique hazards that are present in your work operations. The checklist should also be flexible and specific to hazards for which your organization has experienced a high number of injury claims. It should include items that present physical hazards such as floor surfaces, ladders, and handrails as well as behavioral observations of employees who are performing work tasks. Behavioral items may include observations of employee lifting practices, body posture and work pace. Upon reviewing your checklist, ask yourself the following question, "What does the information on this checklist truly mean?" This will help to ensure that you arrive at the true cause of the identified hazard.

Once the checklist is completed, it is time to go out into the workplace to identify and analyze hazards. The analysis of the hazard is just as important as its identification. For example, if you found a puddle on the floor, you identified it and then cleaned it up. However, after cleaning it up it is important to analyze why the puddle was there in the first place so that it doesn't happen again.

As you go through your facility identifying and analyzing hazards, you may find that there are several hazards that need to be addressed. You will need to be able to prioritize addressing some hazards over others. For example, let's say you find a leaky gas line and stairway carpeting that has serious damage. Both of these are hazards capable of causing serious injury, so which one would you address first? Hazard evaluation and prioritization is the process of evaluating each hazard that you find and then prioritizing the corrective actions that should be taken. One method for evaluating risk is by using established methods such as a Risk Evaluation Matrix. This matrix prompts you to look at the extent of Severity, Frequency and Probability to determine what the priority is compared to other hazards.

Another item to consider in the analysis, evaluation and corrective action stages of your self-inspection is who will be providing it. Will the designated safety coordinator be appointed? The Facilities personnel? Will it be done in conjunction with Safety Committee, local branch management, or senior leadership input? At times, it is good to get input from others to obtain fresh ideas. At other times, corrective actions could get bogged down in personalities and squabbling if there are too many voices. From a regulatory perspective, if your organization has a Safety Committee, then that committee must review the inspections, per the regulation.

Once you have determined the items that need corrective action, you will need to document those actions. Corrective action documentation may be completed on the self-inspection checklist form or on a work order as per the discretion of your organization.

Communicating corrective actions is the next step in this process. Work with your organization to determine how the corrective actions will be communicated. Is the place of origin notified of the corrective action or is the information shared with other departments/locations when appropriate? Information-sharing is an opportunity to address hazards across the entire operation before they cause injuries at individual locations.

Finally, be sure to follow up on the corrective actions that are made. It is important to put into place formal follow-up procedures to make sure that the corrective actions that were developed were actually enacted and effectively addressed the problem. Establish a timeframe for the follow-up process. It could be within one week, one month, 90 days, or may depend upon the extent of the corrective action. Be sure to document the corrective actions that are taken.

Establishing a formal self-inspection program is critical to maintaining safe operations and should be a part of your organization's Injury and Illness Prevention Plan. It is also important to remember that a self-inspection program is only one facet of a comprehensive safety program. For more information on establishing a self-inspection program, contact your Gallagher Bassett Loss Control Consultant.

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