

OSHA Inspections

Phone/Fax Investigations

OSHA carefully prioritizes all complaints it receives based on their severity. For lower-priority hazards, with permission of a complainant, OSHA may telephone the employer to describe safety and health concerns, following up with a fax providing details on alleged safety and health hazards. The employer must respond in writing within five working days, identifying any problems found and noting corrective actions taken or planned. If the response is adequate and the complainant is satisfied with the response, OSHA generally will not conduct an on-site inspection.

On-Site Inspections

Preparation—Before conducting an inspection, OSHA compliance officers research the inspection history of a worksite using various data sources, review the operations and processes in use and the standards most likely to apply. They gather appropriate personal protective equipment and testing instruments to measure potential hazards.

Presentation of credentials—The on-site inspection begins with the presentation of the compliance officer's credentials, which include both a photograph and a serial number.

Opening Conference—The compliance officer will explain why OSHA selected the workplace for inspection and describe the scope of the inspection, walkaround procedures, employee representation and employee interviews. The employer then selects a representative to accompany the compliance officer during the inspection. An authorized representative of the employees, if any, also has the right to accompany an inspector. The compliance officer will consult privately with a reasonable number of employees during the inspection.

Walkaround—Following the opening conference, the compliance officer and the representatives will walk through the portions of the workplace covered by the inspection, inspecting for hazards that could lead to employee injury or illness. The compliance officer will also review worksite injury and illness records and the posting of the official OSHA poster.

During the walkaround, compliance officers may point out some apparent violations that can be corrected immediately. While the law requires that these hazards must still be cited, prompt correction is a sign of good faith on the part of the employer. Compliance officers try to minimize work interruptions during the inspection and will keep confidential any trade secrets observed.

Closing Conference—After the walkaround, the compliance officer holds a closing conference with the employer and the employee representatives to discuss the findings. The compliance officer discusses possible courses of action an employer may take following an inspection, which could include an informal conference with OSHA or contesting citations and proposed penalties. The compliance officer also discusses consultation services and employee rights.

Results

When an inspector finds violations of OSHA standards or serious hazards, OSHA may issue citations and fines. OSHA must issue a citation and proposed penalty within six months of the violation's occurrence. Citations describe OSHA requirements allegedly violated, list any proposed penalties, and give a deadline for correcting the alleged hazards. Violations are categorized as willful, serious, other-than-serious, de minimis, failure to abate, and repeated. In settling a penalty, OSHA has a policy of reducing penalties for small employers and those acting in good faith. For serious violations, OSHA may also reduce the proposed penalty based on the gravity of the alleged violation. No good faith adjustment will be made for alleged willful violations. For information on penalty ranges, see www.osha.gov/penalties

Appeals

When OSHA issues a citation to an employer, it also offers the employer an opportunity for an informal conference with the OSHA Area Director to discuss citations, penalties, abatement dates, or any other information pertinent to the inspection. The agency and the employer may work out a settlement agreement to resolve the matter and to eliminate the hazard. OSHA's primary goal is correcting hazards and maintaining compliance rather than issuing citations or collecting penalties.

BIE Safety Advisor



Monthly Toolbox Talk

Housekeeping

Housekeeping is the number one problem on construction sites. In fact, a good number of workplace incidents can be attributed to poor housekeeping. Poor housekeeping can contribute to slip, trip, fall incidents, struck-by, and caught between incidents, and other hazards may be taken for granted if poor housekeeping, clutter, and debris, become the norm.

What is the purpose of workplace housekeeping?

Poor housekeeping can be a cause of accidents, such as:

- tripping over loose objects on floors, stairs, and platforms
- being hit by falling objects
- slipping on wet, or oily surfaces
- striking against projecting, poorly stacked items, or misplaced material
- cutting, puncturing, or tearing the skin of hands or other parts of the body on projecting nails, wire, or steel strapping.

To avoid these accidents, a workplace must "maintain" order throughout the workday. Although this effort may require a good deal of management and planning, the benefits are many.

What are some benefits of good housekeeping practices?

Effective housekeeping results in:

- reduced handling to ease the flow of materials
- fewer tripping and slipping accidents in clutter-free work areas
- decreased fire hazards
- better access to and control of tools and materials, including inventory and supplies
- more efficient equipment cleanup and maintenance
- more effective use of space
- reduced property damage by improving material handling space

How do we implement an effective housekeeping program?

Housekeeping order is "maintained" not "achieved." Cleaning and organization must be done regularly, not just at the end of the workday. Integrating housekeeping into jobs can help ensure this is done.

A good housekeeping program identifies and assigns responsibilities for the following:

- clean up during the shift
- waste disposal
- removal of unused materials
- inspection to ensure cleanup is complete

