



Preparing for an OSHA Inspection: Is your organization ready?



RISK CONTROL



If you speak to most companies' safety teams, one of their biggest fears is an inspection by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). This doesn't have to be the case. OSHA inspections, just like any other regulatory inspection, are extremely important and should therefore be taken very seriously. However, with proper preparation and planning, the fear can be reduced, allowing businesses to minimize the risks of a potential citation from OSHA.

OSHA oversees the health and safety of more than 130 million American workers and employs over 2,000 inspectors nationwide to ensure workplaces comply with federal health and safety guidelines.

As the name suggests, OSHA inspectors are trained safety professionals and industrial hygienists who typically show up without warning to conduct health and safety inspections. Using a Field Operations Manual (FOM) developed by the Department of Labor, OSHA inspectors are trained to follow the established protocols contained therein. The FOM creates policy and procedures concerning the enforcement of occupational safety and health standards and ensures standards are enforced with uniformity. The FOM includes a list of inspection priority criteria used to allocate enforcement resources. OSHA's inspection priorities are:

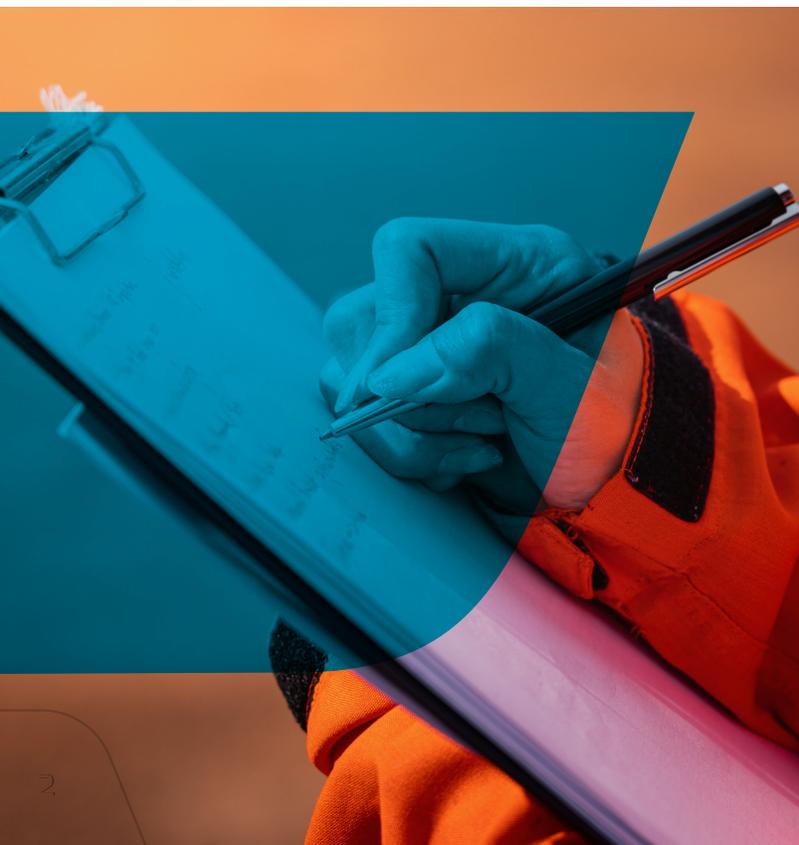
- + + + + 1. Imminent danger
- + + + + 2. Fatalities and catastrophes
- + + + + 3. Complaints and referrals
- + + + + 4. Severe injuries requiring hospitalization, amputation or loss of an eye
- + + + + 5. Programmed inspections, such as National Emphasis Programs (NEP) or Local Emphasis Programs (LEP)

Pre-planning for an OSHA inspection is essential. Businesses should work with key personnel and supervisors at the workplace to ensure everyone knows their responsibilities. The following procedures are best practices that can be used to prepare for an OSHA inspection.

Know Your Rights

The first step in OSHA preparedness is understanding your rights and employee's rights. Part of understanding your rights is knowing OSHA's policy and procedures for performing inspections. The FOM includes inspection criteria procedures that the inspectors must follow to include:

- + Inspection scope (why an inspection is occurring and what can be inspected)
- + Conduct of inspection (presenting credentials, requesting entry, and employee participation)
- + Opening conference (review of employer rights and responsibilities and document review)
- + Walkaround inspection (inspection to identify potential safety and/or health hazards in the workplace)
- + Closing conference (discussion on any apparent violations and other pertinent issues found during the inspection)



Have an OSHA Preparedness Plan

Before OSHA arrives, have a pre-determined plan on how your organization will handle the inspection. This plan should be communicated throughout all levels of your organization. A well-developed plan should:

HAVE A WRITTEN PLAN

A plan should be in writing to ensure consistency. If your business has multiple jobsites or locations, you may need a location specific plan. The FOM states the walkaround inspection should not be delayed in excess of one hour. Wasting time looking for your written plan can be an issue which is why your plan should be posted or housed in a known location, and why more than one individual needs to know the whereabouts of the written plan.

ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITIES

Who has the responsibility of meeting with the OSHA inspector when they arrive at your door? Identify a primary person of contact, as well as a back-up individual available to meet and accompany the OSHA inspector. This designated representative will need to initiate the plan.

IDENTIFY AN OSHA INSPECTION TEAM

Designate a team to participate in the walkaround inspection. It's good to have representatives from both supervision and the field. The benefit of having a field representative is for quick fixes. If certain hazards are identified during the walkaround and a quick fix occurs, often the OSHA inspectors will not document the hazard due to the employer making an immediate good faith effort.

At establishments where more than one employer is present or in situations where groups of employees have separate representatives, it is acceptable to have additional employer/employee representatives for different phases of the inspection. More than one employer representative can accompany the OSHA inspector throughout an inspection if the inspector determines that such additional representatives will aid, and not interfere with, the inspection.

LIST SUPPLIES TO HAVE ON-HAND

There are several items your OSHA inspection teams may need during the inspection for evaluation or verification purposes. Documenting and collecting evidence to defend against issued citations is a critical part of any future defense. Developing a defense file as you go will make it easier if it becomes necessary to defend the company against citations. These items may include:

- + Digital camera with memory large enough for pictures and/or video clips
- + Blank note pad with extra pens
- + Large measuring tape
- + Keys to open any locked doors or cabinets at the facility. (The employer representative should be prepared to only unlock doors as OSHA asks.)

TRAIN KEY PERSONNEL

Company representatives with responsibilities identified in the plan should receive training on all aspects of the OSHA preparedness plan as well as receive an overview of the OSHA inspection process.

TEST THE PLAN

Once training is completed, it's time to check the plan's effectiveness. This can be done by running simulated scenarios with those representatives identified in the plan. Testing the plan should be completed initially, at any time a plan changes, and intermittently thereafter.



Perform Internal Audits

Businesses should routinely review documentation to make sure everything is up-to-date and correct, and periodically conduct checks to ensure all required safety training has been administered and documented. Scheduling regular internal inspections in which a walk-through is completed looking for violations as if you were an OSHA inspector is an effective way of remaining compliant.

Third-Party Mock OSHA Inspections

This type of inspection is a great way to test your company's OSHA preparedness plan and minimize the risk of receiving an OSHA inspection. A mock-OSHA inspection can help you identify areas where safety and health violations may exist within your company. You can design the inspection to be a comprehensive snapshot of your overall safety and health program or limited in scope to a particular hazard or focus area depending on your organization's goals.

The inspector performing a mock inspection typically follows OSHA's FOM with the goal of simulating a real situation. A mock inspection typically consists of a review of your mandated written health and safety programs, employee safety training records, injury and illness records, and a walk-through of your operations to identify safety hazards that could represent violations of OSHA standards.



Conclusion

Preparing for an OSHA inspection can be challenging for a business. The fact that OSHA cannot inspect every workplace is of little consolation when they decide to inspect yours. Some inspections are unavoidable, especially mandated inspections conducted as part of a national, regional, or local emphasis program. Being proactive and properly planning for an inspection can help your organization prepare for a successful outcome.



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