



Health and Safety
Santé et sécurité

PSAC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE **GUIDEBOOK**

PART 2 – WORKPLACE INSPECTION GUIDE



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

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This guide is intended to provide you with information about health and safety and additional tools found in PSAC Health and Safety Committee Toolkit. This guide is not intended to replace the advice of a knowledgeable health and safety professional. Always seek guidance from your local, your PSAC national representative or the PSAC national health and safety specialist in your area before taking on complex issues.

INTRODUCTION

A workplace inspection is an opportunity for committee members or representatives¹ to examine both the work and the workplace, to look at the condition of the tools or equipment that workers use, physical environment and work processes in real time. It's important to do them regularly, make recommendations and document when you do.

Why are workplace inspections important?

The occupational health and safety legislation in Canada is based on the internal responsibility system (IRS). This means raising health and safety hazards with your local health and safety committee², making recommendations to address the hazards, ensuring concerns are documented and hazards are removed, where possible.

The IRS is the philosophy by which all jurisdictions apply health and safety laws.

The foundation of the IRS philosophy is that everyone in the workplace has a role to play in health and safety and that the workplace parties are most likely to find effective solutions when they work together.

See the Internal Responsibility System document in the PSAC Health and Safety Committee Resource Kit for more details on the IRS.

Workplace inspections are one way that workers, as members of the health and safety committee

or representatives, can participate and inform the employer of work hazards. At the same time, the workplace inspection can be used to let the other workers know that there are hazards in the workplace, as a hazard can be pointed out to other workers at the time of inspection.

Legal requirements

Different jurisdictions have different legal requirements about who carries out inspections and how inspections are performed. The PSAC Health and Safety Committee Toolkit contains a summary table of this information. You should look to your jurisdiction's legislation to be sure of inspection rights and requirements.

What is constant across all jurisdictions is that employers must take reasonable steps to protect worker health and safety and that health and safety committee members or representatives must be involved throughout the entire process. Workers doing workplace inspections have a better understanding of where and what to look for, giving them a better chance at finding problems early. The specific process involved in how these inspections take place would be detailed in the workplace inspection policy and program.

When workplace inspections are appropriate for the size and nature of the employer, thorough, done regularly, and the identified items are corrected, employers are considered to be taking a reasonable step to protect workers.

¹ Health and safety representative refers to a person who has been chosen by the union local to bring health and safety-related concerns to the employer in locations where there is no health and safety committee. Where only the committee is mentioned in this guide, it should be expected that the health and safety representative would be the person to carry out the work where no committee exists.

² For this guidebook, health and safety committee will refer to the legislatively required committees or committees required by collective agreements. Other names for these committees include Joint Occupational Health and Safety committees (JOHS) or workplace committees (WPC).

Work time for inspections

Inspections should be performed during work time, and workers should be paid at their regular rate of pay. Health and safety work should not be considered as special or add on work, it should be counted as part of a worker's time in regular work duties. It is important that the workers who are performing the inspections are granted appropriate leave and their workloads are adjusted accordingly.

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HOW TO PERFORM INSPECTIONS

Workers know the work, workplace and different processes that might be happening and have direct connections to the people who work there.

That's how you'll be able to spot previously unidentified hazards or changes in the workplace that have created new hazards. It's looking at ceilings, floors, walls, corners, and joints to see if they look different than when last you saw them. It's about listening to see if you notice a change in the sound of the workplace. It's about talking to workers and asking them if they've noticed anything different, or if they're feeling any ill effects while they're at work. Most often, doing a workplace inspection is about noticing what has changed in the work or workplace and whether that change is good or has created a hazard.

Planning

Planning the inspection is an important first step. You need to know when and where the inspection will take place, and who else might be involved. Planning your inspection will ensure that you have all the tools at your disposal and that the inspection will go as smoothly as possible.

Here are some things to consider when you're planning an inspection:

Determine what the purpose of the inspection will be. You want to know ahead of time what type of inspection you will be conducting. For example, is it a routine workplace inspection or the inspection of a new piece of equipment? The purpose of the inspection will inform how much time needs to be scheduled and who needs to be involved based on their expertise. For example, if you're doing an inspection of the ventilation system, you would likely want to include the people who maintain it and schedule a shorter period of time than what would be required to do the routine inspection of an entire building and any exterior grounds.

The purpose of the inspection will also determine how often to do it. For example, routine inspections may have a legal requirement to be performed monthly or regularly. Check the occupational health and safety requirement in your jurisdiction.

Determine what type of spaces the inspection will cover. You want to know ahead of time what areas you're going to be inspecting. Different spaces have different legal requirements.

For example: if there is a confined space, there may be requirements just to enter the confined space. Knowing what areas exist before you perform the inspection will let you know how much time and what tools or personal protective equipment (PPE) you might need to do the inspection properly. It also gives you the opportunity to inform the supervisor or manager that the inspection will be happening in their area.

Determine what kind of work is done there. Knowing what work is done before you perform the inspection will let you know what types of hazards could be present in the workplace. Specific types of hazards have specific requirements in legislation and regulations. Knowing what types of hazards are present in the work will give you an opportunity to review legal requirements and help inform your inspection.

Even in a single workplace, there can be many different types of work being performed. For example: in a school, there might be teaching in classrooms, clerical work in offices, scientific experiments in laboratories, decorations built in the woodworking shop, exercise in a gym or pool and growing vegetables in the greenhouse. In the office, the committee may be on the lookout for repetitive strain injuries and air quality issues. In the greenhouse, the committee could expect to find a humid, warm environment and hazards related to plants, the chemicals used to fertilize and treat

them and clean the equipment, and the tools in use – things that you would not expect to see in an office space. To learn about the type of work, it helps to speak with workers in the area before and during the inspection and review any safe work procedures that have been developed for the work in that area.

Determine what kind of equipment is used.

Knowing what equipment is used before you perform the inspection will let you know what expertise you might need. No one would expect a person to be an expert on every piece of equipment that might be used in a workplace. For example, a health and safety inspector in a municipality might be inspecting a day care, a long-term care home and a bus depot. It is unlikely that the inspector is going to be an expert on ceiling lifts and buses. But knowing that there are ceiling lifts and buses means that you can request manuals or maintenance records before you head out. It also means that if it's not your area of expertise, you should plan to talk to workers. They do have that expertise and can let you know if everything is working as it should or if there are problems.

Determine what previous inspections have found.

Knowing what problems were previously identified before you perform the inspection will show you what to follow-up on to ensure completion and that no new hazards have been created. It's an easy way to verify that the system is working and that concerns are being corrected. If they have been corrected, you can talk to the workers there to see if things have improved, or if there are still outstanding issues. If concerns are not corrected, they may be referred to the health and safety committee, and a recommendation may be required.

Determine where incidents (including injuries and near misses) have occurred. Knowing where all the incidents have occurred gives the health and safety committee member or representative a chance to take a second look at the space. That gives the member or representative the opportunity to see if there are contributing factors to the injury. It also

gives you the chance to follow up with workers and confirm if they have been exposed to any similar circumstances, or if they are aware of issues that might have contributed to the injury. For example, if you know that there was an injury where a worker fell down some stairs coming in out of the rain, you might inspect the staircase a bit closer to confirm if the anti-slip treads need to be replaced, if the mats are out of place, if the railing is secure, or if the lighting is adequate. You can also ask workers if anyone else had slipped on the floors coming in out of the rain or had a close call in the staircase.

What to bring to an inspection

Here are some elements that might be handy for an inspection:

- Laptop, tablet, and/or clipboard with inspection forms with extra pages for note taking
- Floor plans
- Maintenance records
- A list of potential questions for workers
- Notice of inspection to the supervisor or manager that outlines your permission to be there
- A camera (this may not always be appropriate, for example when children are present)
- Any personal protective equipment or tools required in each area
- An ID tag that identifies you as the health and safety committee or representative worker inspector
- Past inspection reports for the inspection areas
- Injury reports or near misses from the inspection areas
- Minutes of past health and safety committee meeting

It's good practice to let the supervisor or manager know ahead of time that you'll be in the workplace inspecting. That way, they are not surprised to see you, which can make getting into specific areas a lot easier and will be less disrupting to the workers.

Performing the inspection

When you're speaking to workers, ask them specific questions about any change they may have observed. If you ask them: "How is everything?" or "Do you have any concerns?", it is very possible that the answer will be no. You want to ask them specific questions to remind them of potential hazards they may not have consciously noticed in the moment.

Some good questions to ask workers are:

- "Has there been anything that has changed about your work or the tools that you use?"
- "Has there been any new equipment introduced in your workplace?"
- "Have you been given any new tasks at work lately?"

Hazards to consider

There are different kinds of hazards that could be present in the workplace. Here are some of the things that you may want to look for during your inspection:

- Slips, trips, obstructions, and fall hazards
- Chemical hazards like firefighting chemicals, or cleaners, disinfectants or floor strippers
- Biological hazards like viruses, bacteria, or blood
- Physical hazards like radiation, heat, or vibrations
- Mechanical hazards like machines that can pinch, cut
- Ergonomic hazards, like badly fitting chairs or improper equipment that can cause injury to joints and muscles
- Psychosocial hazards
- Violence-related hazards
- How materials are handled and stored
- Repetitive work
- Systemic issues (related to the way work is organized or performed)

Let your experience and the experience of workers guide you. If workers are telling you there's a problem, there probably is one.

- Staffing levels and workload
- Maintenance or signs of wear and tear
- Harassment risk factors
- Shiftwork and night shifts
- Working with the public/public facing
- Working with external organizations (i.e. Canadian Armed Forces)
- Heat and cold
- Non-climate-controlled areas
- Door to door (i.e. Statistical Survey Officers)
- Isolation
- Follow-up on any previously identified item or any injury

A checklist for completing workplace inspections is included as an appendix at the end of this guidebook. Remember – this is only a guide. Let your experience and the experience of workers guide you.

If workers are telling you there's a problem, there probably is one.

Joint versus individual inspections

In some workplaces, inspections are conducted jointly by management and worker members of the Health and Safety Committee. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages, and the outcome often reflects the strength or weakness of workplace relationships.

Some positive impacts of including management in an inspection could be:

- First-hand view at workplace problems
- Facilitate access to specific areas
- Adds a knowledge of administration processes that workers may not have

There could also be some negative impacts of having management present:

- Workers may not want to disclose concerns in front of management
- Pressure not to report hazards
- Pressure to rush through
- Disagreement on what consist of a hazard

Remember that during an inspection, all potential hazards should be recorded, even if there is disagreement between the inspection team. Don't let someone prevent you from writing down a hazard that you have found during your inspection. When committee members sign an inspection form, that signature indicates that they are agreeing with what the report contains and that it is accurate.

If the inspection process becomes a problem, make sure that you let your local executive know, so that they can contact your union representative, and/or PSAC Regional Health and Safety Representative.

Don't let someone prevent you from writing down a hazard that you have found during your inspection.

Note-taking and documentation

The information you collect about workplace hazards must be documented and shared with management. This is essential to ensure that other workers are aware of the issues and, if enforcement becomes involved in the future, there is a clear record of the identified hazard(s). When preparing an inspection report, clearly identify what the hazard is and where it can be found. If a worker has suggestions on how to address the hazard, include it in your report. Always bring extra copies or blank paper: You can use those to sketch the location of a problem or write down additional details that would help communicate the problem.

For example, noting on an inspection report that "water stain on ceiling" and "a risk of workplace violence in the common area" doesn't really point to any specific location in the common area and can make it harder to find for the people coming to fix the problem. They could think it's somewhere else and not find the right problem.

But if the inspection report includes a floor plan (even a rough sketch), the information is easier to understand and cross-reference. For example, looking at the diagram, the information above becomes clearer:

"There is evidence of a water leak (item 5, circle). There are no barriers to the workplace from both entrances (item 1, rectangles) which create a risk of violence from outdoors to the workers".

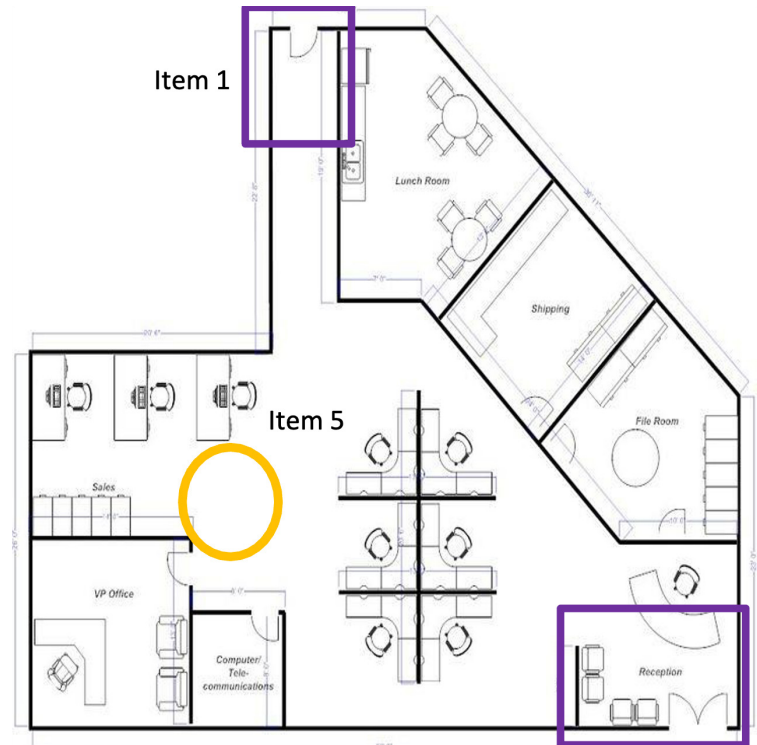
Taking good notes will let everyone understand what and where the hazards are and make discussion at the health and safety committee meeting easier.

TIPS

- Not all hazards have an immediate consequence. If you feel something is hazardous, even if it has not injured a worker, it's important to still consider it a hazard.
- Talk to workers to learn about their experience. Don't forget to ask front-line supervisors or managers if they are aware of any issues in the workplace.
- Use the floor plan to indicate the location of a hazard mentioned in the inspection report.
- If you don't have a floor plan already, you could find one in your building's fire plan.
- You can take pictures for reference points.
- Consider amending your form to include past injury report references.
- Identify items in sequence (assigning a number) with no repeats from month to month – that way, when people refer to inspection item 72, everyone will know which item is being discussed. It will also make it easier to spot a reoccurring problem. For example, they could be identified as follows: items 112, 113, 114, 43, 115.

To further help with classification, the code could include the year. For example, the list above could become the following: items 2024-112, 2024-113, 2025-114, 2025-43, 2025-115.

- Check in with the area supervisor or manager after the inspection to fill them in on what you've found.



HOW TO REPORT THE INSPECTION RESULTS

Now that you've planned, prepared, conducted a workplace inspection, and taken notes on the different hazards in the work being done in the workplace, it's time to prepare the inspection report.

Analyzing

As the inspection is finalized, it's a good practice to go over the items again. Make sure hazards are clearly identified and it is clear what the problems are and where they can be found.

You don't have to suggest ways to fix the problems, as recommendations are discussed at the joint health and safety committee. But if there are obvious solutions to some of the problems or workers suggest fixes, it can be indicated on the report form next to the item or as additional information. For example, it could be that item 1 from the floorplan example above (workplace violence risk) could include a solution or recommendation like "restrict access by locking the doors and installing video cameras and a buzz-in at reception." If the suggested fix is reasonable and would take care of the health and safety hazard, it is very possible that a manager or supervisor will approve it.

The people who performed the inspection might also be asked to estimate how urgently an issue needs to be addressed. In some workplaces, low-priority items identified during inspections may take a long time to be addressed—or may not be addressed at all. While it's reasonable to prioritize urgent issues, non-urgent items still require follow-up. If a low-priority item continues to appear in multiple inspections without resolution, it may be time to issue a formal recommendation.

Recommendations

It is common for workplace inspection forms to be used as-is, with a general recommendation that all identified issues be addressed as soon as possible. Some jurisdictions have legal obligations when it comes to recommendations, so make sure you confirm what applies to your work and workplace. The PSAC Health and Safety Toolkit provides a document on the requirements and process for writing recommendations.

There may be workplace hazards that require more in-depth discussion and more information. Recommendations can be made to have specific items discussed at the health and safety committee meeting to explore more complete solutions.

TIPS

- If the health and safety committee doesn't know enough about a particular hazard, ask for a presentation on the topic at the next committee meeting
- Ask workers about what they think might be helpful to fix a problem.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE REPORT

After the report has been written, it's time to share that information. The workplace inspection policy and program should include the list of positions/people that need to be provided with a copy of the inspection reports.

It's good practice to meet with the manager or supervisor in the area to go over what you've found during your inspection report. This gives the people who have direct responsibility for the work area the opportunity to be involved. Just like workers, front-line supervisors and managers have expertise and experience that can be valuable to finding effective solutions to workplace problems.

Health and safety committee meeting

There should always be an opportunity to discuss the results of workplace inspections during the committee meeting.

It is important to ensure that workers are informed by the employer about the hazard and that temporary measures are put in place while you are looking for more permanent solutions. An example of this could be to seal off and make sure that no one can enter a room where there has been a ceiling collapse because of a water leak while awaiting repairs.

From the floorplan example, you might want to flag the risks of workplace violence. That would allow you to have a greater discussion of the risks at the entrances and potential solutions. For example, maybe you also need to change the doors to

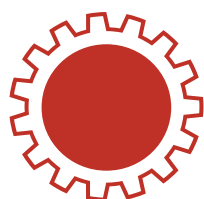
make them secure enough when locked to prevent someone from breaking them down. You might find that you need to add a barrier between the public and the reception, with an additional door to restrict access to the whole workplace at the point of entry.

Following-up

Once items have been raised with the health and safety committee and the management team, it's important to follow-up on those items to track progress and continue to document. There are many items raised in any given year, and it would be quite easy to lose track of some of them if there is only one person managing them all. You want to make sure that you check back a few times with any solution and document your follow-ups.

FINAL TIPS

- Document, document, document!
- Make recommendations for how to solve a concern.
- Have one primary sheet of all the inspection items in order. Once items are addressed, they can be removed from the master list.
- Put items that have been recently corrected on a future inspection list to make sure that the solutions are working well and protecting workers.



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