

OSHA's Recommended Practices for Hazard Identification and Assessment

Source: [<https://www.osha.gov/shpguidelines/hazard-identification.html#ai1>]

To identify and assess hazards, employers and workers:

1. Collect and review information about the hazards present or likely to be present in the workplace.
2. Conduct initial and periodic workplace inspections of the workplace to identify new or recurring hazards.
3. Investigate injuries, illnesses, incidents, and close calls/near misses to determine the underlying hazards, their causes, and safety and health program shortcomings.
4. Group similar incidents and identify trends in injuries, illnesses, and hazards reported.
5. Consider hazards associated with emergency or nonroutine situations.
6. Determine the severity and likelihood of incidents that could result for each hazard identified, and use this information to prioritize corrective actions.

Action item 1: Collect existing information about workplace hazards

Collect, organize, and review information with workers to determine what types of hazards may be present and which workers may be exposed or potentially exposed. Information available in the workplace may include:

- Equipment and machinery operating manuals.
- Safety Data Sheets (SDS) provided by chemical manufacturers.
- Self-inspection reports and inspection reports from insurance carriers, government agencies, and consultants.
- Records of previous injuries and illnesses, such as OSHA 300 and 301 logs and reports of incident investigations.
- Patterns of frequently-occurring injuries and illnesses.
- Exposure monitoring results, industrial hygiene assessments, and medical records (appropriately redacted to ensure patient/worker privacy).
- Existing safety and health programs (lockout/tagout, confined spaces, process safety management, personal protective equipment, etc.).
- Input from workers, including surveys or minutes from safety and health committee meetings.
- Results of job hazard analyses, also known as job safety analyses.

Information about hazards may be available from outside sources, such as:

- OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- Trade associations.
- Labor unions, state and local occupational safety and health committees/coalitions ("COSH groups"), and worker advocacy groups.
- Safety and health consultants.

Action item 2: Inspect the workplace for safety hazards

Hazards can be introduced over time as workstations and processes change, equipment or tools become worn, maintenance is neglected, or housekeeping practices decline. Setting aside time to regularly inspect the workplace for hazards can help identify shortcomings so that they can be addressed before an incident occurs.

- Conduct regular inspections of all operations, equipment, work areas and facilities. Have workers participate on the inspection team and talk to them about hazards that they see or report.
- Be sure to document inspections so you can later verify that hazardous conditions are corrected. **Take photos or video of problem areas** to facilitate later discussion and brainstorming about how to control them, and for use as learning aids.
- Include all areas and activities in these inspections, such as storage and warehousing, facility and equipment maintenance, purchasing and office functions, and the activities of on-site contractors, subcontractors, and temporary employees.
- Regularly inspect both plant vehicles (e.g., forklifts, powered industrial trucks) and transportation vehicles (e.g., cars, trucks).
- Use checklists that highlight things to look for. Typical hazards fall into several major categories, such as those listed below; each workplace will have its own list:
 - General housekeeping
 - Slip, trip, and fall hazards
 - Electrical hazards
 - Equipment operation
 - Equipment maintenance
 - Fire protection
 - Work organization and process flow (including staffing and scheduling)
 - Work practices

- Workplace violence
- Ergonomic problems
- Lack of emergency procedures
- Before changing operations, workstations, or workflow; making major organizational changes; or introducing new equipment, materials, or processes, seek the input of workers and evaluate the planned changes for potential hazards and related risks.

Action item 3: Identify health hazards

Identifying workers' exposure to health hazards is typically more complex than identifying physical safety hazards. For example, gases and vapors may be invisible, often have no odor, and may not have an immediately noticeable harmful health effect. Health hazards include chemical hazards (solvents, adhesives, paints, toxic dusts, etc.), physical hazards (noise, radiation, heat, etc.), biological hazards (infectious diseases), and ergonomic risk factors (heavy lifting, repetitive motions, vibration). Reviewing workers' medical records (appropriately redacted to ensure patient/worker privacy) can be useful in identifying health hazards associated with workplace exposures.

- Identify *chemical hazards* –review SDS and product labels to identify chemicals in your workplace that have low exposure limits, are highly volatile, or are used in large quantities or in unventilated spaces. Identify activities that may result in skin exposure to chemicals.
- Identify *physical hazards* –identify any exposures to excessive noise (areas where you must raise your voice to be heard by others), elevated heat (indoor and outdoor), or sources of radiation (radioactive materials, X-rays, or radiofrequency radiation).
- Identify *biological hazards* –determine whether workers may be exposed to sources of infectious diseases, molds, toxic or poisonous plants, or animal materials (fur or scat) capable of causing allergic reactions or occupational asthma.
- Identify *ergonomic risk factors* –examine work activities that require heavy lifting, work above shoulder height, repetitive motions, or tasks with significant vibration.
- Conduct *quantitative exposure assessments* –when possible, using air sampling or direct reading instruments.
- *Review medical records* –to identify cases of musculoskeletal injuries, skin irritation or dermatitis, hearing loss, or lung disease that may be related to workplace exposures.

Action item 4: Conduct incident investigations

Workplace incidents –including injuries, illnesses, close calls/near misses, and reports of other concerns– provide a clear indication of where hazards exist. By thoroughly investigating incidents and reports, you will identify hazards that are likely to cause future harm. The purpose of an investigation must always be to identify the root causes (and there is often more than one) of the incident or concern, in order to prevent future occurrences.

- Develop a clear plan and procedure for conducting incident investigations, so that an investigation can begin immediately when an incident occurs. The plan should cover items such as:

- Who will be involved
 - Lines of communication
 - Materials, equipment, and supplies needed
 - Reporting forms and templates
- Train investigative teams on incident investigation techniques, emphasizing objectivity and open-mindedness throughout the investigation process.
 - Conduct investigations with a trained team that includes representatives of both management and workers.
 - Investigate close calls/near misses.
 - Identify and analyze root causes to address underlying program shortcomings that allowed the incidents to happen.
 - Communicate the results of the investigation to managers, supervisors, and workers to prevent recurrence.

Effective incident investigations do not stop at identifying a single factor that triggered an incident. They ask the questions "Why?" and "What led to the failure?" For example, if a piece of equipment fails, a good investigation asks: "Why did it fail?" "Was it maintained properly?" "Was it beyond its service life?" and "How could this failure have been prevented?" Similarly, a good incident investigation does not stop when it concludes that a worker made an error. It asks such questions as: "Was the worker provided with appropriate tools and time to do the work?" "Was the worker adequately trained?" and "Was the worker properly supervised?"

Action item 5: Identify hazards associated with emergency and nonroutine situations

Emergencies present hazards that need to be recognized and understood. Nonroutine or infrequent tasks, including maintenance and startup/shutdown activities, also present potential hazards. Plans and procedures need to be developed for responding appropriately and safely to hazards associated with foreseeable emergency scenarios and nonroutine situations.

Identify foreseeable emergency scenarios and nonroutine tasks, taking into account the types of material and equipment in use and the location within the facility. Scenarios such as the following may be foreseeable:

- Fires and explosions
- Chemical releases
- Hazardous material spills
- Startups after planned or unplanned equipment shutdowns
- Nonroutine tasks, such as infrequently performed maintenance activities
- Structural collapse
- Disease outbreaks

- Weather emergencies and natural disasters
- Medical emergencies
- Workplace violence

Action item 6: Characterize the nature of identified hazards, identify interim control measures, and prioritize the hazards for control

The next step is to assess and understand the hazards identified and the types of incidents that could result from worker exposure to those hazards.

- Evaluate each hazard by considering the severity of potential outcomes, the likelihood that an event or exposure will occur, and the number of workers who might be exposed.
- Use interim control measures to protect workers until more permanent solutions can be implemented.
- Prioritize the hazards so that those presenting the greatest risk are addressed first. Note, however, that employers have an ongoing obligation to control all serious recognized hazards and to protect workers.