

Keys to Effective Office Area Safety Inspections

Workplace inspections identify safety and health (S&H) hazards in your work environment, in turn preventing injuries and illnesses. Nearly every organization has administrative work area – they are just as important to include in your inspection process as other parts of your organization. An office environment has a unique set of hazards you may not find in other work areas. Be sure to include administrative areas in your inspection program so that you do not overlook any workplace hazards.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT OFFICE INSPECTIONS?

Designate a person to inspect each administrative work area. Train the inspector on hazard identification and recognition for office hazards and document this training.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU INSPECT OFFICE AREAS?

You typically do not need to inspect administrative work areas as often as other workspaces with increased risks (e.g., production lines, laboratories); however, they must be inspected on a regular basis. For example, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) requires you to inspect your entire organization quarterly. Therefore, you must inspect your office areas at least once a quarter to meet VPP requirements.

Be sure to review Service and Agency requirements, local instructions and policies, and your SOHMS criteria to see if there are set frequencies for your inspections.

WHAT SHOULD INSPECTORS LOOK FOR?

Consider creating a customized inspection checklist to aid in identifying office hazards. Refer to the table on the next page for examples of office safety inspection items. The list is not all-inclusive.

HOW SHOULD INSPECTORS DOCUMENT FINDINGS?

Ultimately, it is up to your organization to decide. Inspectors can document their findings on a checklist or email a list of their findings. Regardless, inspection documentation should include:

- Inspector name(s), including additional employees participating in the inspection
- Date of completion
- Hazards corrected during the inspection or “on the spot” corrections (for trending purposes)
- Hazards identified requiring additional attention (e.g., work orders).

Ideally, inspection findings should be submitted to a designated person for corrective actions and trend analysis.

BEST PRACTICE

Use this approach in your inspection process to help employees understand office hazards.

- ➔ **Ask multiple employees to participate in office inspections to increase employee involvement.**
- ➔ **Have several inspectors look at the same area to gain different perspectives in potential office hazards.**
- ➔ **Educate your inspectors on hazard identification and recognition. Trained inspectors should show new inspectors what to look for.**

POSSIBLE OFFICE SAFETY INSPECTION ITEMS

ELECTRICAL

- ✓ Appliances or extension cords plugged into power strips, extension cords, or cubicle walls
- ✓ Daisy chains
- ✓ Extension cords under doorways, across floors, under carpets
- ✓ Damaged, cut, or spliced cords
- ✓ Exposed wires
- ✓ Broken electrical outlets and outlet covers
- ✓ Loose plugs when plugged into electrical outlets
- ✓ Ungrounded electrical outlets
- ✓ Lack of ground fault circuit interrupters near water or wet areas
- ✓ Broken or missing ground prongs on cords

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- ✓ Difficult to read evacuation maps
- ✓ Outdated floor plans and emergency routes
- ✓ Blocked exit routes and exit doors
- ✓ Locked exit doors
- ✓ Exit doors not side-hinged
- ✓ Dimly lit exit routes
- ✓ Exit signs direct employees toward hazards
- ✓ Exit signs unilluminated or not in line of sight
- ✓ Homemade exit signs with small lettering
- ✓ Missing "Not an Exit" signs

CHEMICAL

- ✓ Missing Safety Data Sheets
- ✓ Improperly stored containers
- ✓ Unlabeled containers
- ✓ Unapproved chemicals

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

- ✓ Wet/damp ceiling tiles
- ✓ Dirty vents
- ✓ Blocked ventilation grates
- ✓ Designated smoking areas immediately outside exterior doors

HOUSEKEEPING

- ✓ Unkempt, unclean, or cluttered desks
- ✓ Unattended spills
- ✓ Excessive dust on top of appliances and other objects

LADDER USE

- ✓ Use of unstable devices (e.g., chairs) instead of ladders
- ✓ Uninspected step ladders
- ✓ Use of ladders behind doors and around corners

ERGONOMICS

- ✓ Non-adjustable chairs
- ✓ Screen glare from bright lights or windows without coverings
- ✓ Clutter in the workspace
- ✓ Poor lifting techniques used

WALKING-WORKING SURFACES

- ✓ Torn, loose, or wet carpet/carpet tiles
- ✓ Unattended drawers left open
- ✓ Storage on top of tall cabinets
- ✓ Wires and cords pulled across aisle ways
- ✓ Wires and cords sticking out from under cubicle walls

OFFICE EQUIPMENT

- ✓ Spilled toner
- ✓ Poor placement of copy machines (noise, heat, ventilation)
- ✓ Outdated, unsealed, or dirty items in first aid kits
- ✓ Uninspected automated external defibrillators
- ✓ Open or unlatched paper cutter arms
- ✓ Lubrication oil left out near shredders
- ✓ Cabinets or bookshelves not secured from tipping

FIRE

- ✓ Missing/removed ceiling tiles
- ✓ Unmounted fire extinguishers
- ✓ Missing fire extinguisher signs
- ✓ Uncharged, blocked, or uninspected fire extinguishers
- ✓ Blocked, corroded, or dirty sprinkler heads
- ✓ Storage on top of refrigerators
- ✓ Heat-emitting devices in cubicles

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.