

Keys to Effective Office Area Safety Inspections

Workplace inspections help prevent injuries and illnesses by identifying safety and health (S&H) hazards in your work environment. While organizations typically have a safety inspection program in place, many forget to include their office areas! Additionally, it is common for office personnel to believe there are no S&H hazards in their work area. According to the [National Safety Council](#), the most common types of injuries related to office environments are falls, struck/caught by, and ergonomic issues. Be sure to include office areas in your inspection program so you do not overlook any hazards.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT OFFICE INSPECTIONS?

Designate a person to inspect the office. Train the designated person on hazard identification and recognition, specifically for office hazards, and document this training.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU INSPECT OFFICE AREAS?

Offices typically do not need inspected as often as higher hazard areas, like heavy industrial areas. However, you must inspect them regularly. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) requires you to inspect your entire organization quarterly. Therefore, inspect your office areas at least once a quarter to meet VPP requirements. Additionally, review local and organization instructions. Oftentimes, these instructions set the frequency for all inspection, not just office areas.

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 THEIR FINDINGS?

Inspectors can document their findings on a checklist, or simply make a list; ultimately, it is up to your organization on how to document inspections. Upon completion of an inspection, be sure to submit findings to the appropriate person for correction and trend analysis. Inspection documentation should include:

- Inspector name(s), including employees participating in the inspection
- Date of completion
- Hazards corrected during the inspection
- Hazards identified requiring additional attention (e.g., work orders)

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

Best Practice

If supervisors conduct office inspections, consider having other employees participate to increase employee involvement and add a different perspective on potential office hazards. The supervisors educate employees on hazard identification and recognition through a hands-on application. This approach helps more of your office employees understand office hazards.

POSSIBLE OFFICE INSPECTION ITEMS

ELECTRICAL

- ✓ Appliances or extension cords plugged into power strips, extension cords, or cubicle walls (and daisy chains)
- ✓ Extension cords under doorways, across floors, under carpets
- ✓ Damaged and cracked cords
- ✓ Damaged, cut, or exposed wires
- ✓ Deteriorated outlets and covers
- ✓ Loose plugs
- ✓ Ungrounded outlets
- ✓ Lack of ground fault circuit interrupters near water/wet areas
- ✓ Broken or missing ground prongs

CHEMICAL

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

HOUSEKEEPING

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

ERGONOMICS

- ✓ Computer screens positioned too high or too low
- ✓ Unsupportive or non-adjustable chairs
- ✓ Monitor too close or too far away
- ✓ Poorly placed keyboards
- ✓ Screen glare
- ✓ Clutter in the workspace
- ✓ Poor employee posture
- ✓ Poor lifting techniques used

OFFICE EQUIPMENT

- ✓ Spilled toner
- ✓ Poor placement of copy machines (noise, heat, ventilation)
- ✓ Outdated items in first aid kits
- ✓ Uninspected automated external defibrillators
- ✓ Open paper cutter arms
- ✓ Unlatched paper cutters
- ✓ Oil left out near shredders

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 sight
- ✓ Homemade exit signs with small lettering
- ✓ Missing "Not an Exit" signs

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

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

LADDER USE

- ✓ Unstable materials used instead of ladders
- ✓ Uninspected step ladders
- ✓ Placement of ladders behind doors and around corners

FIRE

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

WALKING-WORKING SURFACES

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