Inspections - how to do them

The general approach: What the HEC is going on?

Inspections are an essential tool to prevent injuries, illnesses and diseases. **Investigations** are a specialized type of inspection, usually after something has happened. They are both part of a program and a way to evaluate it.

Whether it's an inspection or investigation, looking at the workplace for hazards involves being a detective to find out ***what the HEC is going on***:

- Is there a **H** azard?
  - look at the workplace for hazards by category (See SH.2)
- Is there an **E** xposure?
  - rate the hazards for the likelihood people are exposed to them ie. can people be affected by the hazard? can the hazard get into the body by at least one route of entry?
  - what is supposed to prevent or reduce the exposure?
  - how well is it working?
- What are the **C** onsequences?
  - who could be exposed ?
  - how often are they exposed?
  - for how long?
  - how much are they exposed to?
  - what effects are possible (acute and chronic)?

The HEC sheet is very general, but it provides a useful framework for your inspections. It can be adapted with more specific categories and items or colour-coded to help you keep track of the hazard categories.

The first page is best used during an inspection. Before doing one, you can fill in the items for which you want to look for specifically, or just some things to look for in general.

Inspections - what the HEC* is going on?

Choose the hazard category for which you are using this sheet; write that on the line in the second column. Use page one to list the hazards found. Use the second page to jot down ideas about priorities, possible solutions and, if it's a quick fix, who's to do what by when.

Date: _____ Work area: _____ Done by: _____

Item #	What are the Hazards?	What are the Exposures?			What are the Consequences?				
		Is exposure possible?	What prevention/control measures are there supposed to be?	How well are they working?	Who can be exposed?	How often?	How long?	How much?	What is the possible effect?

*HEC = Hazard/ Exposure/ Consequences?

SH.5

The second page can help you prepare your report and recommendations. Alternately, use the form to record the results of your inspection.

Item #	Problem/hazard	Priority	Action required		Who's involved?	Dates for change	Done & checked by
			Short term	Long term			

Workplace Inspections - *What the HEC is going on?*

See SH.5 for a blank form

Preparation

Get together a "toolbox". It should include:

- floor plans, block diagrams and work area descriptions
- inspection checklists and report forms
- list of things to look for (see below)
- list of people to whom you should talk (supervisors, union reps or members, worker/health and safety committee reps, specific workers)
- information from material safety data sheets (MSDSs), especially for things that:
  - are considered a carcinogen, allergen/ sensitizer or reproductive toxin
  - have other serious chronic effects
- paper for notes and sketches
- clip board to carry paper & write on
- measuring tape
- tissue paper on a stick (to check the ventilation)
- camera
- personal protective equipment (PPE) you need for different work areas
- a card with your name, phone number and/or e-mail address to give to people who want to talk to you another time, etc.
- … **and** something in which to carry these things without hurting your body.

The **list** of things to check out should be based on:

- people's complaints
- incident or near-miss reports
- previous inspection reports and follow-up notes
- health and safety committee minutes
- reports from other people's inspections or investigations (WSHD, consultants)
- anything else you think of

Plan your route beforehand. Ask about areas where you'll need PPE or where you cannot take certain items because of static, etc. You might decide to ask specific questions based on the information you gather. It helps to write these down ahead of time.

Doing the inspection

Be methodical and thorough. This is a useful sequence to use when you enter an area:

- look **around**: get in the habit of keeping to a system by starting from the left or right
- look **down**: check the floor and pits, etc.
- look **up**: check the ceiling, upper storage racks and cupboards, overhead fixtures, etc.
- look **inside**: storage cabinets, cupboards, storage rooms, etc.

Always check for MSDSs, labels and warning signs.

Do not operate equipment. If you need to see something in action, ask the operator to demonstrate. If the operator doesn't know about possible hazards, this is a good indication there may be reason for concern.

Some hazards are difficult to see or assess with just your senses. Never taste anything or sniff at unknown vapours or gases.

Never ignore something because you don't know how to accurately judge possible hazards. When in doubt, ask! If you want more information, go to your resources after the inspection.

Talk to workers and supervisors. Workers, in particular, deal directly with a task, machine or equipment, so their "take" on a situation is essential. Be aware that some people may not want to talk to you if the supervisor is within earshot or can see them. Or, they may have questions you can't answer right away. Your card can be useful to give them for follow-up.

If you're doing the inspection with someone else, two sets of eyes can be better than one. Decide how you'll divide up the work. For example, each person could take two or three types of hazards on which they will concentrate.

Be prepared to recommend monitoring equipment if you think it's really needed. On the other hand, your tissue paper on a stick is a handy way to measure ventilation, especially if exhaust vents are in hard-to-reach places. If a place is noisy, you know it's above 85 decibels (dB) if you have to raise your voice to talk to someone one meter away.

Writing things up and down

Use the HEC sheet or other inspection checklist you put together, along with the floor plan or drawings you make on the spot.

Don't rely on your memory. For each hazard:

- locate it
- give a clear description
- think about what difference it makes if the equipment or tool is being used or not, and if something is out of order, come back another time to see it working
- consider what happens when you're not there (e.g. maintenance, non-routine activities, different shifts) and ask questions to figure out if you should come back
- ask for suggestions about what would fix something or improve a situation

After looking at a possible hazard:

- figure out if the complaints or questions you get from people in the area, or the problems you see, are one-time events or happen often
- fill in the other parts of the HEC sheet under Exposure and Consequences
- rate the hazard in terms of whether or not
  - it could be prevented altogether
  - is adequately controlled now
  - there are inadequate or no prevention measures
  - you're not sure if prevention measures are needed or adequate
- write down your questions, observations and information from people in the area right away, in case you're interrupted
- note anything which hasn't been corrected since the last time you or someone else looked at the situation
- take a picture or make a sketch if some thing's hard to describe or you want to back up your notes

If you find problems

If something is an immediate hazard, talk to the worker(s), union steward (if there is one) and supervisor. Recommend the equipment, tool or task be stopped until changes are made. Include protective equipment that might allow work to continue for a short time until repairs are done. Make notes about what you said, and to whom.

If your recommendation is not followed, be prepared to call or talk to someone else in authority, as soon as possible. Be prepared with information about:

- what you found
- why you think it's a serious problem that needs to be fixed immediately
- what you recommended doing
- who you talked to
- what you said
- what the people you talked to said and did

For other hazards, talk to the worker(s) and supervisor about what you found, as soon as possible. Ask why something is the way it is, to better understand a situation. Ask for suggestions about how to fix a problem. (**Resist recommending solutions before you have all the information you need.**)

Be sure to tell them you'll have a written report done by a certain date. If you can, offer to return to discuss your report and recommendations.

Note things that are working well, or provide good examples of how to do something or deal with a hazard. You may want to keep a list of these good practices for discussions about how similar situations can be addressed.

After the inspection

Don't make assumptions about why something is or isn't a hazard. If you didn't get enough information to make a decision, figure out what else you need to know. The best question you can always ask is: *why?*

If you did the inspection with others, debrief about what you saw, heard, etc.

Before recommending changes, consider:

- the *Prevention triangle* - how close are you to the source of the problem?
- short- and long-term solutions
- who's affected by the changes?
- what are the consequences of the changes?
- are new hazards created?
- what do(es) the worker(s) involved have to say?
- what does the supervisor have to say?
- what does the union say? (if there is one)

Write up your report. Include:

- problems fixed since the last inspection
- progress on problems found in earlier inspections
- reasons why they haven't been fixed yet
- new problems
- priorities and reasons for this assessment
- proposed solutions and strategies if you have helpful ideas (short- and long-term)
- steps needed to investigate something further
- recommended follow-up, including dates and people who are responsible for it

You can use the second part of the HEC checklist and *Healthy solutions for workplace hazards* chart (CP.10) to do this.

Present it to the committee, relevant supervisor(s), employer and health and safety staff.

Figure out what kind of follow-up is needed, the dates involved and who is responsible for what. Always get a record in the committee minutes about what's been done and needs to be done.

This has been adapted from the British Columbia Federation of Labour's "Occupational health and safety education project", Vancouver, 2002, with additional materials from Margaret Keith and others (2002) *Barefoot research.* Geneva: International Labour Organisation, and personal experience.