

Preparing for an OSHA inspection

When the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) comes knocking, what are the practices and policies a facility should expect?



What prompts an OSHA inspection?

Many different circumstances can prompt an OSHA inspection, ranging from a workplace death to mere chance. The following are some of the reasons why OSHA may inspect your facility:

- Catastrophes and fatalities.
- Employee complaints.
- Referrals, which can come from any entity, including another government agency.
- Programmed inspections, in which worksites are randomly selected, or based on emphasis programs, injury rates or previous citations.
- Follow-up inspections.

Your Right to An Inspection

Often, OSHA prefers to “investigate” complaints by faxing a letter asking about the hazard to the employer, rather than by conducting an on-site inspection. The employer is required to respond back to OSHA within five working days. However, if you give OSHA a written, signed complaint that documents a hazard or an OSHA violation and want OSHA to come to your workplace, OSHA must do an on-site inspection.

Advance Notice

OSHA will give employers advance notice of an inspection only under four conditions:

- * In cases of apparent imminent danger, to try to get management to fix the condition immediately.
- * When the inspection must be after regular business hours or when special preparations are necessary.
- * If management and worker representatives are not likely to be on-site unless they have advance notice.
- * In other circumstances where the OSHA Area Director thinks a more complete inspection would result, such as in a fatality investigation.

OSHA rarely gives advance notice. When OSHA does give advance notice of an inspection to management, they must also inform the union. If there is no union and no safety committee with a worker representative, OSHA only has to inform management.

On-site Inspections

- * Presentation of credentials—The on-site inspection begins with the presentation of the compliance officer’s credentials, which include both a photograph and a serial number.
- * Opening Conference— The compliance officer will explain why OSHA selected the workplace for inspection and describe the scope of the inspection, walkaround procedures, employee representation and employee interviews.
- * Walkaround—Following the opening conference, the compliance officer and the representatives will walk through the portions of the workplace covered by the inspection, inspecting for hazards that could lead to employee injury or illness.
- * Closing Conference—After the walkaround, the compliance officer holds a closing conference with the employer and the employee representatives to discuss the findings.