

Key Elements for Worker Participation

In Factory Walk-Around Inspections

Workers can play an essential role in inspections of factories to find and fix all the health and safety hazards in the workplace. To play this role, workers need health and safety training, release time to be part of the inspection team, and the authority to propose and verify corrections of identified hazards. Worker inspectors need to be active before, during and after the factory inspections.

Before the inspection occurs

- Ask coworkers for information about hazards, their concerns about conditions, and any health symptoms they may have. This can be done by interviews or a written survey.
- Review reports of any previous inspection of the workplace done by the employer, monitors for the brands or retailers, by the government agencies, or by insurance companies, to learn what hazards were identified then and if these hazards have been corrected.
- Review any available records which indicate areas of the workplace or particular activities that have generated injuries and illnesses – including any inventory of chemicals on-site; any data safety sheets for these chemicals; any “job hazard” analysis done for specific jobs or departments; factory medical clinic records indicating worker complaints, injuries and illnesses; and any reports of testing the air or water in the factory.
- Review the records of any factory Health & Safety Committee, including meeting minutes; accident investigations; any hazard analyses; employee complaints or union grievances filed with the Committee.
- Develop a written list or a “hazard map” of the factory that identifies the hazards present in the workplace, including safety hazards (unguarded machinery, electrical shock), health hazards (chemical and noise exposures, high rates of repetitive motion), and hazards created by the organization of work (high production quotas, too few workers).
- Request the inspection team provide worker participants with an orientation and information about the inspection activities; request release time from production duties and pay for the time of the inspection; and request the authority to make proposals for hazard corrections and to verify they are completed.

During the inspection walk-around

- Be sure to have a notebook or paper to take notes; use a camera or “smart phone” with a camera; use simple tools like a tape measure and a flashlight.
- Use the list of hazards identified before the inspection started to evaluate each and every item on the list.
- Use a simple checklist as a reminder to look at all aspects of the workplace.

- Follow the production process while doing the walk-around, that is, start the inspection where the production process begins and follow each step of the work. This can be done for the factory as a whole or by department, one after another.
- Take photos of each and every identified hazard.
- Interview workers and supervisors in each department, how many interviews per department will depend on the size of the factory, but interview at least two workers in each major work area.
- Use your own senses – smell, taste, sight and hearing – for indications of harmful chemical or noise exposures, and to identify the sources of these exposures.
- Visit factory departments on different times of the day, if possible, that is, inspect the factory on different work shifts.
- Evaluate three general categories of hazards – the physical facility (floors, lighting, stairs); hazards created by the production process (machinery, chemical use, noise levels), and the work practices (how the work is actually performed).
- Write in the notebook a brief description – while walking around – of each identified hazard, including its specific location, identifiers of machinery like model and serial number, measurements of the size and location of the hazard.
- Meet as a group at the end of the inspection day to review your notes to ensure that all the hazards identified by inspection team members are written up.

After the inspection walk-around is completed

- Meet as a group to review your field notes and look at the photographs taken during the inspection walk-around.
- Number each hazard identified in the inspection, and propose possible corrections and a correction timeline for each identified hazard.
- Consult with co-workers who may have worked at other factories with similar hazards and have seen effective controls of these hazards in those workplaces.
- Verify that the correction for each numbered hazard has been implemented, or there is a plan for when the correction will be implemented and what interim measures will be put in place to protect workers until the final correction is completed.
- Verify that the implemented correction actually fixes the problem and does not create a new hazard to workers.
- Meet as a group 30 days and 60 days after the inspection date to evaluate if there are any hazards that have not been corrected or if the corrections are not effective.