

DEPARTMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY INSPECTIONS



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1 INTRODUCTION

This guidance is produced to assist University departments in the implementation of effective departmental health and safety inspection procedures.

The basis of successful safety management within the University is the installation and maintenance of effective systems aimed principally at the prevention of accidents and ill-health to staff and students, the protection of welfare standards, the protection of the environment, compliance with applicable legislation and the prevention of loss to the University. Such systems will identify the health and safety standards required to achieve these ends. Systems are then needed that will monitor and measure the actual performance in practice, and provide information for action and review purposes.

Safety monitoring systems may be of a proactive nature such as safety audits, safety inspections, health and safety reviews, or of a reactive nature such as the reporting, recording, and investigation of accidents and incidents, and analysis of illness, accident, and first aid records etc.

There are no specific rules or requirements relating to which form of safety monitoring should be carried out, different forms of monitoring can be used to cover specific situations and circumstances. The objective is to gain information on the level of performance in an organisation, workplace, work activity, or process.

2 WHY INSPECTION ?

Active safety monitoring encompasses a range of techniques to enable monitoring and measurement of performance in meeting the stated health and safety control systems and standards. Departments should have assessed the risks and hazards in their activities and produced and implemented risk control measures, safe systems of work, equipment specifications, personal protective equipment specifications, environmental controls, welfare standards, etc. It is therefore necessary to be assured that these are observed and maintained, and progress in achieving health and safety objectives and standards is known.

The inspection based methods are probably the least demanding, and give the best return for the time spent. Effective inspections can normally be staffed from within the department. All departments should have staff competent to carry out inspections of part or all of their activities and facilities. It may be helpful for those undertaking inspection to take suitable health and safety courses to ensure competency and confidence in all aspects of the process. Such training should be recorded. It is also helpful to exchange with team members from other areas to strengthen individual inspections, and develop team skills and knowledge. It can also be a valuable developmental experience for the staff concerned. These methods are visible and co-operative and so can contribute to strengthening the departmental safety culture.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Various forms of safety monitoring can be used in the workplace, all have the objective of measuring elements of health and safety performance against standards and/or assessing compliance with internal or external requirements. A brief description of the two forms of inspections most easily achieved in departments follows:

3.1 Safety Tours

A safety tour is an unscheduled examination of a work area undertaken by a selected group of staff or an individual. The inspecting team would normally include the member of staff with direct responsibility for the area being inspected, selected staff, and trade union or employee representative. The area or facilities to be examined are normally narrow and well defined.

Typical examples can be standards of housekeeping; observance of safe systems of work and PPE use, examination of welfare facilities etc. Safety tours could be made following information or decisions by health and safety panels, departmental decisions, or at the request of employee representatives. This type of inspection can be useful for heads of department to undertake as it is quick and effective and illustrates commitment.

3.2 Safety Inspection

This is a scheduled inspection of the workplace. It is normally carried out by a small team who are selected to enable a wide, general and reasonably detailed inspection of the particular workplace to be made.

It is intended to be a wider and more general examination of safety performance at a particular point in time, rather than the resource intensive and in-depth approach of a Safety Survey or Safety Audit.

The inspection should include elements such as fire and emergency provisions, building safety and condition, plant and equipment maintenance and condition, cleaning and housekeeping, PPE/safe systems, electrical safety, lighting and environmental controls, and any significant hazards specific to the particular workplace. Any other hazards noted during the inspection will be recorded. An inspection may include examination of health and safety documents such as COSHH and risk assessments, safe systems of work, permits to work, access to enter procedures etc.

3.3 Other Techniques

Like other elements of health and safety, monitoring needs to be related to the level of risk presented. Low risk areas or activities do not merit the level of controls that are justified in high risk areas. Departments may have staff competent to carry out more sophisticated methods of safety inspection and analysis such as Safety survey, Safety audit, Job safety analysis, or Project safety analysis. If anyone does feel that these techniques can be helpful and are needed, then please contact the Health and Safety Unit for further advice.

4 COMPETENT TO INSPECT ?

Competence is a concept fundamental to health and safety legislation, but no single agreed definition has been produced. A distillation of various definitions could be:

Competent Persons - inspections

Possesses a good knowledge and general understanding of the facilities, work, processes, or substances etc involved, the principles of risk assessment and risk prevention, and current health and safety applications.

Further requirements are the ability to apply this competence to the inspection process. This involves co-operating with others in identifying health and safety risks and hazards, identifying problems of compliance with internal rules and external legislation, assessing and reporting the need for remedial actions

In some areas competence may not rest only on the possession of recognised skills or qualifications. In simple situations it may only require an understanding of relevant current best practice, an awareness of the limitations of one's own experience and knowledge; and the willingness and ability to supplement and develop existing experience and knowledge.

In the case of higher risk, more complex and/or highly technical activities/equipment/processes then appropriate competence will necessarily be demonstrated by suitable qualifications, skills and experience.

5 EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Employees working in the areas inspected often have substantial knowledge and understanding of the day to day hazards than any occasional observer, it is therefore important to involve them in the inspection process. This can also help to generate understanding, and improve the safety culture.

Legislation requires that employee representatives are consulted in matters relating to employee health, safety, and welfare. Trades Unions often appoint Safety Representatives who have the right to represent their members interests, conduct inspections of members workplaces, and are trained via TUC health and safety courses. It is therefore sensible to invite appropriate representatives to take part in inspections.

6 INSPECTION AND POST-INSPECTION ACTIONS

Whatever method of inspection is chosen, it is helpful if the team is of reasonable size.

Two to four persons is normally enough to provide the range of skills and knowledge for an effective inspection. A short inspection team discussion prior to inspection will enable the team to identify priorities and prevent time being wasted. The inspection should be planned to take no more than two

hours, and preferably less. Even the most enthusiastic inspectors can become jaded and bored after two hours. If the department is extensive with a number of different activities it would be appropriate to divide up the inspection regime to enable a full inspection to be completed within the academic year.

The team must be seen to fully support and believe in what they are doing. It is very important that the inspection team use and follow the safety measures required in the areas inspected, it is also important that any unsafe practice or condition observed is stopped or rectified immediately. If inspections are perceived to be nothing more than a paper exercise they will soon cease through lack of support, and health and safety standards will become devalued and impossible to maintain.

Inspection teams will find it very useful to use prepared lists to guide and focus attention. It is very easy to become involved and distracted by particular issues during an inspection, and as a result miss or forget others.

Frequency of inspections is, at least initially, a matter of judgement and experience. Clearly resources of people and time are limited, so areas of higher risk should be targeted with greater frequency, say termly or more frequently if the risks are more significant. Lower risk areas such as offices could probably be adequately inspected once per year. The inspection reports themselves will provide a good basis for reviewing inspection frequencies.

It is vital that a detailed and accurate report is generated by the inspection team. It is of course good practice to produce a draft for the approval of the team members, so as to arrive at an agreed final report. It is recommended that the team identify any strengths and commendable elements seen during the inspection so as to give encouragement, as well as describing weaknesses and matters requiring attention. It may well be that the good practice seen in one department may have application in other departments if the information is made available.

The report is most useful if it is in a "for action" format. The items requiring attention are listed, prioritised, and a clear statement of action required, by whom, and by when, is made by each item. This will necessitate follow-up reports which will ensure that remedial action has been taken, and is recorded. These documents should be considered by the department health and safety committee where one exists, used as a major element in health and safety review procedures, and filed in the departmental office for reference purposes.

All departmental inspection reports are required to be passed to the appropriate Local Site Health and Safety Panel for consideration.

7 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The departmental inspection reports together with other information such as accident/incident information and statistics, training records etc should provide a substantial element of factual information and feedback into the departmental health and safety performance review. This then becomes a

more reliable basis for reviewing and making decisions on health and safety objectives, policy, and strategy.

8 INSPECTION CHECK LISTS

Check lists are helpful as a guide and to ensure items are not forgotten or passed by. There are elements of inspection that are common to nearly all departments, and which should be included in any safety inspection, so these will be used as an example check list. The example check list is not complete, it is merely intended to be a starting point from which departments can develop their own lists.

The many departments within the University have a huge range of risks and hazards which are sometimes of a very specific and specialist nature. These may be laboratory processes using biological agents or chemicals, engineering machinery and processes, electrical hazards or working off campus. Check lists covering these activities should be drawn up within the department by the staff who possess the specialist understanding and knowledge required. Individual departments will also devise check list formats most suitable for their own circumstances. Where for some reason departments do not feel competent the Health and Safety Unit can be contacted for advice.

When preparing for departmental inspection, it should be remembered that the University has a legal duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees, and all others that may be affected by its activities. This means that the risks and hazards presented to students, maintenance staff, cleaning staff, external contractors, emergency services staff, visitors and neighbours have all to be carefully considered.

9 EXAMPLE CHECK LIST

Fire/Emergency provisions normally found adjacent to entrances/exits.

Emergency exit doors, test opening mechanisms, escape routes clear of obstruction inside and outside building, Emergency exit signs present and in good order.

Fire extinguishers and hose reels, in place, security seal not broken, inspection date within the past year. Fire alarm break glass call points, visually not damaged.

Fire action notices, present, in good order, clearly legible, assembly point shown.

Fire doors not wedged open

9.1 Buildings - internal fabric and condition

Visual check for signs of hazard to health, safety, or welfare of users.

Hazards could be damage such as cracks in walls or ceilings, severe water penetration, rotted doors or windows and frames, worn or damaged floors or carpets, worn or damaged stairs. Decoration, in good order, allows for adequate levels of cleanliness.

9.2 Buildings - work environment

Environment, adequate levels of lighting, adequate temperature control, sufficient provision for fresh air, noise levels adequately controlled. Computer workstations comply with applicable legislation. Adequate clear space in which to work, traffic routes kept clear of obstructions, no hazardous storage problems, no unnecessary accumulations of flammable materials inside buildings, refuse removed regularly, cleaning adequate.

Drinking water readily available, adequate sanitary and washing facilities. Furniture and fittings safe, suitable, in good order, clean and well maintained. Secure dry storage for outdoor clothing. Any facilities provided for eating and drinking are suitable and hygienic.

9.3 Substances

Hazardous substances used are stored, handled, used, and disposed of according to adequate and sufficient COSHH/Risk assessments. Any PPE or handling aids required in COSHH assessments or risk assessments are readily available and used, stored, maintained, or replaced as required. Safety controls, information and training, and supervision are appropriate to the risks, fully implemented, and recorded, unauthorised access is effectively prevented

9.4 Equipment

Any routine testing and inspections required under applicable legislation are carried out and appropriate records kept (LEV, Pressure vessels, Fume cupboards, Compressed gas equipment, Lifting equipment, Radiation sources, etc). Adequate inspection and reporting systems in place to ensure maintenance and repairs are carried out and safety standards maintained. All guards and protective devices are in place and working correctly, risk assessments are adequate and fully implemented. Any PPE specified is available and used. Electrical safety, visual check of plugs, cables, and equipment for signs of wear or damage, check on PA test dates, RCD's are used where appropriate. Noise/vibration hazards are controlled. Unauthorised access is effectively prevented.

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION SOURCES AND GUIDANCE

There are a very extensive range of leaflets, booklets, and books available from the Health and Safety Executive at:

HSE Books
PO Box 1999
Sudbury
Suffolk
CO10 6FS.
Tel 01787 881165
Fax 01787 313995

Health and Safety Enquiries
HSE Infoline
Tel: 0541545500
Or write to:
HSE Information center
Broad Lane
Sheffield S3 7HQ

The University Health and Safety Unit can be contacted for advice or information as follows:

Health and Safety Unit
Loxford Tower, Manchester

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