

# Keys to Effective Office Area Safety Inspections

Workplace inspections identify safety and health (S&H) hazards in your work environment, in turn preventing injuries and illnesses. Many organizations forget to include office areas in their workplace inspection program. Be sure to include office areas in your inspection program to make it comprehensive and ensure you do not overlook any workplace hazards.

## WHO SHOULD CONDUCT OFFICE INSPECTIONS?

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

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU INSPECT OFFICE AREAS?

You typically do not need to inspect offices as often as higher hazard areas (e.g., heavy industrial areas, production lines, laboratories); however, you must inspect them regularly.

The 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 to see if there are set frequencies for your inspections.

## 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 FINDINGS?

Ultimately, it is up to your organization on how to document inspections. Inspectors can document their findings on a checklist, or simply make a list of their findings. Inspection documentation should include:

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

Ideally, inspection findings should be submitted to a designated person for corrective actions and trend analysis.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

**Consider having multiple employees participate in office inspections to increase employee involvement.**

**Having several inspectors look at the same area offers different perspectives in identifying potential office hazards.**

**Your inspectors must be educated on hazard identification and recognition. Have a trained inspector show these employees what to look for.**

**Using this approach in your inspection program helps more office employees understand office hazards.**

## POSSIBLE OFFICE SAFETY INSPECTION ITEMS

### ELECTRICAL

- ✓ Appliances or extension cords plugged into power strips, extension cords, or cubicle walls
- ✓ Daisy chains
- ✓ Extension cords under doorways, across floors, under carpets
- ✓ Damaged, cut, or spliced cords
- ✓ Exposed wires
- ✓ Broken electrical outlets and outlet covers
- ✓ Loose plugs when plugged into electrical outlets
- ✓ Ungrounded electrical outlets
- ✓ Lack of ground fault circuit interrupters near water/wet areas
- ✓ Broken or missing ground prongs on cords

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

### CHEMICAL

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

### INDOOR AIR QUALITY

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

### HOUSEKEEPING

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

### LADDER USE

- ✓ Unstable devices (e.g., chairs) used instead of ladders
- ✓ Uninspected step ladders
- ✓ Use of ladders behind doors and around corners

### ERGONOMICS

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

### FIRE

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

### OFFICE EQUIPMENT

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

### 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

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