

# Hazard Identification and Assessment



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*One of the "root causes" of workplace injuries, illnesses, and incidents is the failure to identify or recognize hazards that are present, or that could have been anticipated. A critical element of any effective safety and health program is a proactive, ongoing process to identify and assess such hazards.*

### To identify and assess hazards, employers and workers:

- Collect and review information about the hazards present or likely to be present in the workplace.
- Conduct initial and periodic workplace inspections of the workplace to identify new or recurring hazards.
- Investigate injuries, illnesses, incidents, and close calls/near misses to determine the underlying hazards, their causes, and safety and health program shortcomings.
- Group similar incidents and identify trends in injuries, illnesses, and hazards reported.
- Consider hazards associated with emergency or nonroutine situations.
- Determine the severity and likelihood of incidents that could result for each hazard identified, and use this information to prioritize corrective actions.

Some hazards, such as housekeeping and tripping hazards, can and should be fixed as they are found. Fixing hazards on the spot emphasizes the importance of safety and health and takes advantage of a safety leadership opportunity.

### Action item 2: Inspect the workplace for safety hazards

Hazards can be introduced over time as workstations and processes change, equipment or tools become worn, maintenance is neglected, or housekeeping practices

decline. Setting aside time to regularly inspect the workplace for hazards can help identify shortcomings so that they can be addressed before an incident occurs.

### How to accomplish it:

- Conduct regular inspections of all operations, equipment, work areas and facilities. Have workers participate on the inspection team and talk to them about hazards that they see or report.
- Be sure to document inspections so you can later verify that hazardous conditions are corrected. Take photos or video of problem areas to facilitate later discussion and brainstorming about how to control them, and for use as learning aids.
- Include all areas and activities in these inspections, such as storage and warehousing, facility and equipment maintenance, purchasing and office functions, and the activities of on-site contractors, subcontractors, and temporary employees.

Many hazards can be identified using common knowledge and available tools. For example, you can easily identify and correct hazards associated with broken stair rails and frayed electrical cords. Workers can be a very useful internal resource, especially if they are trained in how to identify and assess risks.

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### Note:

"Risk" is the product of hazard and exposure. Thus, risk can be reduced by controlling or eliminating the hazard or by reducing workers' exposure to hazards. An assessment of risk helps employers understand hazards in the context of their own workplace and prioritize hazards for permanent control.