



INFLUENCING CULTURE - DRIVING CHANGE

OSHA Workplace Inspection Guide for Small Businesses

This practical guide explains what small business owners and managers should do when an OSHA Compliance Safety and Health Officer (CSHO) arrives at their workplace for an inspection. It is designed for small businesses and organizations that may not have full-time safety staff or the experience necessary for dealing with OSHA but still want to respond professionally and effectively to an OSHA visit.

Why OSHA Shows Up

OSHA inspections typically occur for one of several reasons:

- Employee complaints
- Referrals from other agencies
- Injury or illness data trends
- Fatalities or catastrophes
- Imminent danger situations
- National, regional, or local emphasis programs
- Programmed inspections of high-risk industries

Step-by-Step Guide: When OSHA First Arrives

1. Remain calm, professional, and courteous.
2. Verify the inspector's credentials and request a business card.
3. Determine the purpose and scope of the inspection.
4. Notify senior management and your safety representative (if you have one) immediately.
5. Assign a company representative to escort and remain with the inspector at all times.
6. Prepare to provide OSHA injury and illness records (OSHA 300, 300A, 301) if requested. By the inspector. You have 4 hours to produce these records.
7. Document the visit internally including arrival time, inspector name, and stated reason for the visit.
8. Plan the safest and most direct route to the inspection area. If necessary, go around the outside of the building to get access.

Step-by-Step Guide: During the Inspection (Walk-Around)

9. Ensure a knowledgeable company representative accompanies the inspector.
10. Assign a second employee to take notes and photographs.
11. Take the same photographs or measurements that the inspector takes.
12. Ask questions if you do not understand what the inspector is documenting.



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13. Correct minor hazards immediately if it is feasible to do so.
14. Answer questions truthfully but only respond to what is asked. Do not volunteer additional information.
15. Identify any areas, documents or processes that containing trade secrets and make these known to the inspector (if applicable).
16. Document every document request and conversation.

Employee Interviews

OSHA inspectors may interview employees privately. Non-supervisory employees has the right to decline a private, one-on-one interview with an OSHA inspector, as these interviews are entirely voluntary. Employees can also end an interview at any time, refuse to sign statements, and decline to be recorded (voice and video). However, OSHA can compel participation later through a subpoena.

Supervisory employees represent the company, so interviews with them should ideally occur with a management representative or legal counsel present.

Closing Conference

At the end of the inspection, OSHA will typically conduct a closing conference. During this meeting the inspector may discuss potential violations, recommended abatement actions, and next steps in the process. Citations are not finalized during this meeting; they are reviewed by the OSHA Area Director before being issued.

Things You Should NOT Do or Say

- Do not lie or provide false information.
- Do not obstruct or interfere with the inspection.
- Do not volunteer extra information that was not requested.
- Do not guess if you do not know the answer.
- Do not admit fault or violations during the inspection.
- Do not allow inspectors to walk the facility unescorted.
- Do not coach or pressure employees on what to say.
- Do not ignore deadlines for responding to citations.

Key Employer Rights

- You have the right to verify credentials.
- You have the right to understand the scope of the inspection.
- You have the right to accompany the inspector during the walkthrough.
- You may photograph and document everything the inspector documents.
- You have the right to protect trade secrets.
- You have the right to contest citations within 15 working days.



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Helpful Proactive Option: OSHA On-Site Consultation Program

Small businesses can request a confidential OSHA consultation visit at no cost. Consultants help identify hazards, suggest improvements, and assist with developing safety programs. They do not issue citations or penalties. The only requirement is that serious hazards identified during the consultation must be corrected.

Best Practices for Small Businesses

- Maintain accurate OSHA injury and illness records.
- Conduct regular workplace inspections.
- Train supervisors on OSHA requirements.
- Develop written safety programs appropriate to your operations.
- Document corrective actions when hazards are identified.
- Keep training and maintenance records organized.

Final Thoughts

The best defense against an OSHA inspection going badly is preparation. Companies that maintain organized records, understand basic OSHA procedures, and train their managers on how to respond to an inspection are far more likely to have a smooth and professional experience.

Preparation does not have to be complicated or expensive. Many small organizations successfully strengthen their safety programs by partnering with knowledgeable safety professionals who can help them understand regulations, identify hazards, and build practical systems that protect both employees and the business.