

INVESTIGATING JOB HAZARDS



Tools that can help identify hazards in the workplace include:

- Worksite inspections, including assessment of equipment, walk ways, and work practices.
- Written surveys of employees' health symptoms.
- The Log of Work-related Injuries and Illnesses (Cal/OSHA Log 300).
- Hazard mapping.
- Body mapping (shows symptoms employees may have).
- Job task analysis (breakdown of tasks and associated risks).



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- Workers' compensation records.
- Interviews with employees and administrators.
- Monitoring records showing exposure to chemicals, noise, and other hazards.
- Any required medical test records, such as hearing or blood lead level tests.
- Inspection records from Cal/OSHA and other agencies (for example, fire department, health department, EPA), including any citations or fines.
- The school district's written safety programs, such as the Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP), required by Cal/OSHA.
- The school district's written policies and procedures for performing specific tasks and using specific tools and equipment.
- Minutes of health and safety committee meetings.
- Grievances filed about health and safety issues.
- Incident/accident investigation records, including underlying causes of the incident and what was done to prevent similar incidents in the future.
- An inventory of hazardous materials in use and their Safety Data Sheets (SDSs).
- Manufacturers' manuals, operating instructions, and safety literature for tools and equipment.
- Maintenance records for equipment and machinery.



Worksite Inspections

Before conducting a worksite inspection, request and look over available documents related to the area you will be inspecting. Try to obtain records of any previous inspections, injury reports, accident investigation reports, reports of illnesses, and information about work procedures and equipment.

The inspection team should bring the following materials:

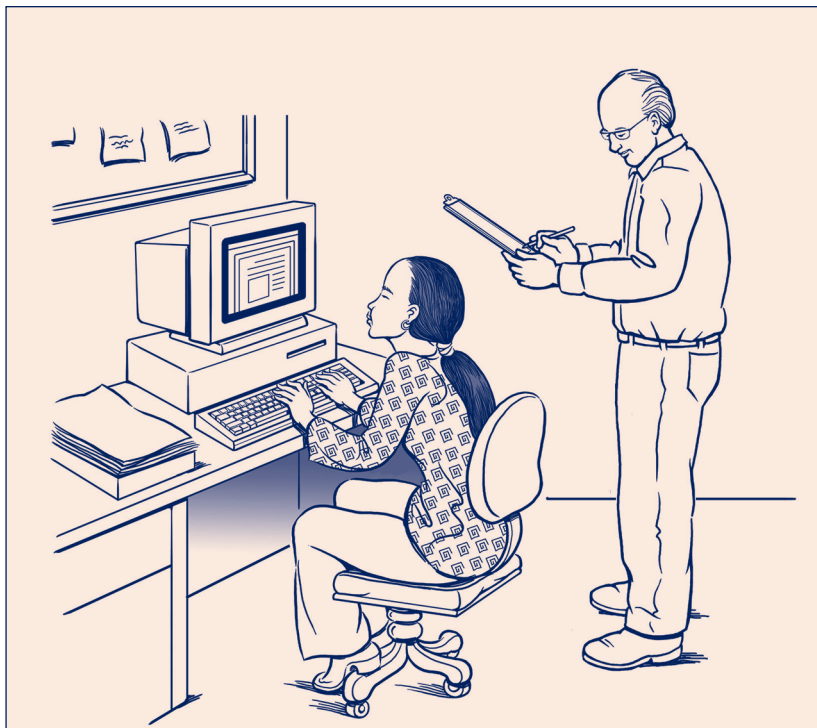
- Checklists for specific hazards and for general work operations.
- Notepaper to document what you see and to take notes on conversations with employees and supervisors.
- Equipment to measure, monitor, and document hazards, such as cameras, tape measures, sound level meters, and thermometers.



Points to Remember

- Try to understand the work process from start to finish. Talking to workers and supervisors can help you do this.
- Inspect work areas again at different times or on different days.
- Look for all types of hazards—those that have immediate (acute) effects, like objects that can fall, and those that have long-term (chronic) effects, like repetitive motion.
- Always talk with employees to clarify your observations and add insight. For example, ask: Are things usually like this? Have there been problems or concerns? Is there anything else we should look at?
- Document your observations by:
 - using written checklists or note paper.
 - writing down the model and serial numbers of equipment.
 - taking measurements of equipment and the dimensions of work areas.
 - taking photographs, if possible, of equipment and work areas.

SASH Factsheet H, “Job Hazards in Schools,” has a sample worksite inspection checklist for schools. It is just an example, not a comprehensive checklist.





Worker Surveys

It is often useful to ask employees about what training and protective equipment they have received and what health and safety concerns they have. Surveys of employees can be done by distributing a written questionnaire, interviewing them in person, or meeting in groups.

Written Questionnaires

- Talk informally with people in the different areas of the school to get their general ideas before you create the survey. Know what information you're looking for.
- Keep the survey short.
- Make the survey attractive and simple to fill out.
- Use everyday language and avoid technical terms. Remember that employees' reading levels may vary.
- Consider translating the questionnaire into other languages if necessary or offer to help employees who have difficulty reading English as they fill out the questionnaire.
- Include an open-ended section for employees to discuss any issues or concerns they may have.
- Include a brief introduction and explain why this survey is important.
- Ask questions that are appropriate for the particular job titles and job tasks you are targeting (if any). For example:
 - Ask about specific symptoms an employee may be experiencing, like muscle strain, backache, or headache.
 - Ask about sources of stress like poor supervision, understaffing, and conflicting priorities.
 - Ask about poor workplace design that may cause musculoskeletal disorders such as repetitive strain injury or carpal tunnel syndrome.
 - Ask about reactions to or concerns about chemical or biological hazards.
- Ask about past accidents or incidents at school, and whether the causes were satisfactorily corrected.
- Explain what will be done with the results.





Interviews

- Speak to more than one employee in every work classification. Ask about their specific tasks, especially any that could be hazardous, even if done only occasionally. Ask what personal protective equipment they use, what training they have received, what injuries or illnesses they have had, what health symptoms they have noticed, and what concerns or worries they have about their health and their work.
- Speak to supervisors to find out what they know about the hazards, what precautions they take to control them, what personal protective equipment is available, what training the workers have received, and what procedures are followed when new hazards are recognized. Also ask about any injuries or illnesses that have occurred.
- Speak to maintenance and operations department employees who know the school environment and equipment well. Try to find out what problems have occurred.
- Speak with human resources staff who know what types of injuries and illnesses employees have reported.
- Speak with the health and safety committee (if one exists) or the JPA or school risk manager, if there is one, about the hazards in the school and the protective measures that are used.

To get the best information from the people being interviewed, it is best to talk to them privately. Hold the conversation away from other people, and offer to keep the person's name confidential if necessary.

Meet in Groups

- Hold a discussion group to talk about common health problems or concerns.
- Use a “body map”— a large outline of the human body where group members can mark where they are having symptoms.

Adapted from materials developed for The Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program (WOSHTEP).