



In 2024, OSHA conducted 34,625 inspections nationwide, while Illinois OSHA and federal OSHA together performed 3,445 inspections in Illinois. These efforts were aimed at protecting over five million workers across the state. Although the chances of an OSHA inspection are relatively low, factors such as operating in a high-risk industry sector, elevated injury and illness rates, experiencing a severe injury, or worker complaints can attract OSHA's attention and lead to an inspection. In this month's article, we will describe the typical OSHA inspection process.

OSHA's enforcement activities include inspections that involve an investigation after an incident has occurred as well as inspections that are not triggered by a workplace injury. Both types follow these steps: site entry, opening conference, walkaround, closing, and reporting results.

Entry:

Once a worksite is selected for inspection, the OSHA compliance officer will gather information about the employer prior to arrival. They may do this through pre-entry observation or by other data sources. It is also important to recognize that OSHA does not provide advance notice of inspections. Upon arrival, the compliance officer will introduce themselves by presenting their credentials and request to speak with the highest-level manager present. The compliance officer should be escorted to a conference room for an opening conference.

Opening Conference:

The opening conference is for explaining the purpose of the inspection as well as for gathering information such as OSHA logs, plans, training records, and employee lists. The scope of the inspection influences the documents requested. The opening conference is the employer's opportunity to ask questions and get a better understanding of the inspection ahead.

Walkaround:

The scope of the inspection influences the extent of the walkaround. For example, complaint-triggered inspections focus on specific areas, while comprehensive inspections can encompass the entire workplace. The employer representative who accompanies the compliance officer should take their own notes and photos. The officer may request clarification on work practices and training during the walkaround. They may also conduct confidential employee interviews.

Closing Conference:

During the closing conference, the compliance officer will present their initial findings, discuss potential violations, and outline steps to immediately correct observed hazards. An overview of employer rights and obligations will be given, along with information on the Illinois Department of Labor's On-Site Safety and Health Consultation Program.

Results:



If violations are issued, a citation will be mailed to the address and addressee provided to OSHA during the opening conference. The abatement timeline begins once the citation packet issued, so employers should not waste time understanding their obligations and options. Employers must post the citation packet so employees can review it. Employers can accept the results of an inspection and focus on abatement, contest citations and penalties through an informal process (discussing with an OSHA area director), or file a formal contest (administrative law process).

Once a citation is issued, the data is posted on a U.S. Department of Labor database accessible to everyone. This is one way predatory safety and health consultation firms may target employers after an OSHA inspection. The Illinois Department of Labor's On-Site program exists to assist small and medium-sized employers in preparing for potential OSHA inspections and providing abatement support afterward. This program, offered at no cost, delivers the support and guidance needed to identify hazards, develop a hierarchy of controls, and establish a lasting safety and health program. Visit <https://worksafe.illinois.gov/> or contact Harry (Hap) Hileman with the Illinois Department of Labor at 217-993-2111 or harry.hileman@illinois.gov for more information.



* The 21(d) On-Site Consultation Cooperative Agreement is funded by a federal grant, constituting ninety percent of the overall budget. State funds finance ten percent.

Source: OSHA Fact Sheet - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Inspections