Safety and Housekeeping Inspections

What would the world look like if we never used safety inspections on our buildings, bridges or airplanes? And what incidents and accidents have been averted because we have?

The objective of a safety and housekeeping inspection is to identify and correct unsafe conditions and work practices before an accident occurs. Inspections can also be an effective tool in evaluating other safety process components, such as adequate safety training, safety rule compliance and supervisor accountability. Since inspections are a preventive initiative, they can act to reduce upsets at operations, thereby increasing efficiency and productivity.

A well-run checklist inspection program can help launch a school’s occupational safety and health process or strengthen an existing one. There are several ways to develop a program, but regardless of the method, it should be based on realistic expectations. In the first year of a program, it may not be possible to evaluate every aspect — start with those that present the greatest hazards, then phase in others.

A safety checklist program has three major features:

1. The Safety & Health coordinator who puts the program together and trains teachers and others to use the checklists.
2. Procedures for teacher training, checklist dissemination, follow-up and recordkeeping.
3. Trained teachers, safety committee members and other persons use the checklists regularly in career-technical classrooms, shops and labs.

When developing an inspection program, first identify specific needs. This can be done by analyzing and evaluating previous accidents to determine which kinds have occurred. Since most accidents are caused by unsafe work practices and conditions, it’s important to include both of them on the list for evaluation. Many checklists have been developed for school district exposures and are available from United Heartland or other resources.

One of the other benefits of conducting safety and housekeeping inspections is employee involvement in the process of hazard identification and corrective action. United Heartland Loss Control can also be utilized to assist school districts in evaluating workplace safety exposures.

Surveys and related services may not reveal every hazard, exposure and/or violation of safety practices, but the process will go a long way in preventing accidents. Checklists are used to serve as reminders for items to inspect, and as records of what has been inspected. They also help give the inspection direction and allow for immediate recording of all findings and recommendations.

As with accident investigation recommendations, safety and housekeeping findings should be documented and receive proper follow-up. In addition, completed reports should be reviewed by administration and/or the safety committee to ensure compliance.

Introducing any new program, no matter how useful, may place additional burdens on staff members. Demonstrating the benefits may help encourage the use of a checklist program.

- Use a phased-in approach to keep people from feeling overwhelmed.
- Distribute checklists piecemeal, perhaps as “the hazard of the week,” or in batches during the course of the year. This is especially important for teachers with labs, shops or classrooms having multiple checklists.
- Emphasize that nobody is penalized for finding problems — this is a proactive way to maintain safety and health in the classroom, shop or lab.
- Stress that checklists are an easy way to determine compliance without having to locate and plow through regulations.
- Point out that similar regulations apply to the private sector and therefore can help teachers evaluate cooperative experiences.

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