

### 3. Document Problems

To document hazards and health problems, collect information through interviews and observations. Talk to as many co-workers as possible to find out if there are complaints of health symptoms, illnesses, injuries, or hazards. Observe workers doing their jobs to see what tasks are involved and what chemicals and equipment they are using. Keep a notebook and take photos or videotapes, if possible. It is also a good idea to draw a floor plan of the area and identify hazardous "hot spots."



Documentation will be essential later, when trying to *so*lve problems.

#### **WORKPLACE WALKTHROUGH**

Walkthrough evaluations provide an opportunity to systematically monitor conditions and check that promised improvements have been made. They are also a chance to talk to workers about their concerns and demonstrate activity by the health and safety committee.

There can be advantages to joint inspections with management – as long as their presence doesn't alarm workers. For example, joint union-management walkthroughs can accelerate the resolution of health and safety issues because both parties have seen the problem. However, be sure all interviews with workers are conducted in private, and don't allow management to rush the inspection process. If workers can get hazards fixed immediately during a walkthrough, this sends an important message that the committee is effective.

### **MAY UNIONS INVESTIGATE HAZARDS?**

In union workplaces, the union has the right to investigate accidents and suspected health and safety hazards by conducting inspections. The union has this right under labor laws in order to fulfill the union's contract administration and bargaining responsibilities. If the employer does not voluntarily allow such an inspection, the union should make the request in writing using letter 2 in PART THREE, Section 4.

### **WALKTHROUGH CHECKLISTS**

A checklist can be a good aid for thorough inspections. If using a checklist to go through the workplace, workers will not have to remember everything they are looking for. They can also use the checklist to go back later to see if problems have been corrected. However, checklists should never be used as a substitute for careful observations and talking to co-workers.

Below are examples of good checklists.

### **WEBSITES WITH MORE INFORMATION**



Self-Inspection checklists covering health and safety standards

*OSHA Checklists*

[www.osha.gov/SLTC/smallbusiness/chklist.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/smallbusiness/chklist.html)

*Safe Schools.* The majority of these 79 checklists are on safety hazards. Although these were developed for schools, most checklist items reflect OSHA/NJPEOSH requirements for all types of workplaces.

[www.njsafeschools.org/pub.html](http://www.njsafeschools.org/pub.html)

*Hazard Communication Checklist* used by NJPEOSH inspectors

[www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/hazcomcheck.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/hazcomcheck.pdf)

*Indoor Air Quality Checklist* used by NJPEOSH inspectors

[www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/iaqchecklist.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/iaqchecklist.pdf)

*Computer Workstation Health and Safety Checklist*

[www.nycosh.org/workplace\\_hazards/vdt.html](http://www.nycosh.org/workplace_hazards/vdt.html)

## SURVEY WORKERS

Keep these points in mind when using a written survey:

- Keep it as short as possible. A survey with one to three questions can be effective.
- Use language everyone will understand.
- Ask questions that can be answered yes or no, true or false, multiple choice, or with a check mark.
- Leave space for additional information and opinions.

Good planning is necessary when carrying out a survey. How will surveys be distributed to workers and how will they be collected? Who will sort through the answers that come back? What will be done with the results?

It is often effective to do a survey by asking workers questions and writing down their responses. The benefits of a one-on-one survey are:

- It's a good organizing technique since it gets people talking about their jobs.
- It's a way to involve workers who do not read well without embarrassing them.
- It often produces better results than sending out paper that may get lost or ignored.

Besides finding out what workers are concerned about, surveyors should ask if they would be willing to help solve a problem. If no one is concerned enough about a problem to do anything about it, this may not be a good issue to work on.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

To protect both the privacy and job security of respondents, survey results must not be used in any way that reveals the identities of individual workers.

## HELPFUL HINT



Four sample surveys are found in PART THREE, Section 3:

- *Worksite Inspection Checklist*
- *Worker Health and Safety Complaint*
- *Work-Related Health Problems Report*
- *Indoor Air Quality Occupant Survey*

