



# Conducting Effective Safety Observations and Inspections

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B.S in Occupational Health and Safety



Nearly a decade of experience in risk management



Started my career with a heavy civil GC



Most Workplace Incidents are  
Preventable

# AGENDA

MM/DD/YYYY

1. Spot Issues Before Someone Gets Hurt
2. Talk to Workers in a Respectful, Direct Way
3. Turn What You Observe Into Real Fixes

A construction worker wearing safety glasses, a grey hoodie, and brown overalls is using a circular saw to cut a piece of wood on a wooden structure. The worker is focused on the task, and the background shows a blurred green landscape. The image has a dark blue overlay.

Spot Issues Before Someone  
Gets Hurt

# Why Observations Matter

The supervisor advantage: You know the work, the people, and the patterns

Most incidents are preceded by warning signs that went unnoticed or unaddressed

Scheduled inspections alone are not enough

Your daily walk throughs are your most powerful safety tool

# Know The Difference

## Safety Observation

- Informal
- Ongoing
- Focused on behavior and conditions during normal work

## Safety Inspection

- Formal
- Scheduled
- Systemic review of the workplace

Both matter – and both are your responsibility

# What to Look For: The Two Categories

## Unsafe Conditions

- Physical hazards – equipment, environment, housekeeping, PPE availability

## Unsafe Acts

- Behaviors- shortcuts, improper technique, missing PPE, bypassing controls

Most incidents involve both- look for the combination

# Simple System for Your Rounds

Stop, look, and think before moving through an area

Use a mental checklist:

- **People:** Are they working safely? Using PPE correctly?
- **Equipment:** Is it in good condition? Being used correctly?
- **Environment:** Housekeeping, lighting, signage, access/egress
- **Procedures:** Are people following the process?

# Common Hazards Supervisors Miss

Normalized risk:  
hazards that have  
“always been  
there”

Housekeeping  
issues that seem  
minor but create  
slip/trip/fire risk

PPE worn  
incorrectly (vs. not  
worn at all)

Ergonomic  
exposure during  
routine tasks

Near-miss  
conditions that  
nobody reported

The danger of  
“we’ve never had a  
problem with that”

## Key Takeaway

You don't need a scheduled inspection to spot a hazard. Your walkthrough is your most powerful safety tool

*Think of one area or task on your site where you have noticed something that felt "off" but never got addressed. What was it?*

A woman in a yellow shirt is standing and speaking to a group of people seated around a table in a meeting room. The room has a white wall with a grid pattern. The text "Talk to Employees in a Respectful, Direct Way" is overlaid on the image in white. The woman is gesturing with her hands as she speaks. The people at the table are listening attentively. There are papers, a mug, and a glass on the table.

Talk to Employees in a  
Respectful, Direct Way



# Why the Conversation Matters

- Identifying a hazard is only half the job
- Response determines whether behavior changes
- A bad conversation can shut people down, create resentment, or make them hide issues
- A good conversation builds trust and reinforces a safety culture

# Feedback

## Corrective Feedback

- Addressing unsafe behavior or conditions in the moment

## Positive Reinforcement

- Recognizing and calling out safe behavior

Both are essential- most supervisors only do one

Ratio matters: people need to hear what they are doing right, not just what they are doing wrong

# How to Give Corrective Feedback

## The 4-step model:

1. Describe what you saw (specific, not general)
2. Explain the risk (why it matters)
3. State what you need (clear expectation)
4. Confirm understanding (ask, don't assume)

Example: “I noticed you were not wearing your cut gloves when you were breaking down that box. A slip of that blade can cause a serious cut. Going forward I need you to have those gloves on any time you are using a blade. Does that make sense?”

# Keeping the Conversation Calm and Constructive



Stay curious not accusatory: “Help me understand what happened” vs “Why weren’t you wearing your PPE?”



Avoid public callouts- pull people aside when possible



Acknowledge their experience and pressures



Focus on the behavior not the person



End with a clear expectation, not a lecture

# Reinforcing Good Habits

- Catch people doing it right- and say something
- Be specific: “I saw you check your mirrors before backing that forklift- that is exactly what I want to see”
- Positive feedback in front of peers is powerful
- It sets the standard for the whole crew without singling anyone out negatively
- Safety culture is built one conversation at a time

## Key Takeaway

How you say it matters as much as what you say. A respectful, direct conversation changes behavior. A lecture just create resentment.

Turn What You Observe Into  
Real Fixes

# Why Recording What You Find Matters



# What to Document



What you observed  
(condition or behavior,  
specific location, date,  
and time)



Who was involved (if  
relevant)



What you did about  
it in the moment



What follow up is  
needed and by whom



Keep it simple- a  
short note is better  
than nothing

# Spotting Patterns

- One observation is a data point. Multiple observations are a pattern
- Ask yourself:
  - Is this happening in the same area?
  - Is it the same person or the same crew?
  - Is it the same time of day or shift?
  - Is it tied to a specific task or piece of equipment?

Patterns point to root causes – not just symptoms

# From Observation to Action

- Not every finding needs a big fix- but every finding needs a response
- Immediate fixes: correct it on the spot
- Short-term fixes: report it, tag it, take it out of service
- Long-term fixes: submit a work order, escalate to management, update the procedures
- Follow up to make sure the fix actually happened

# Closing the Loop



## Key Takeaway

An observation without a follow-up is just a walk. Document what you find, spot the patterns, and push for real fixes

# 3 Things to Remember

- 1. Spot it:** Use your daily walk through to look for hazards and unsafe acts – don't wait for a scheduled inspection
- 2. Say it:** Give Feedback that is respectful, direct, and specific—both corrective and positive
- 3. Fix it:** Document what you find, track patterns, and follow through until the issue is resolved

# Questions?

Please email additional questions to [losscontrol@bhhc.com](mailto:losscontrol@bhhc.com)