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HAZARD HUNTING—LOOKING FOR DANGERS

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control



Remember when you were a kid and the comic book asked you to “Find the hidden objects in this scene!” The objects were there, often disguised within the leaves of trees and bushes, but you had to look hard to find them. At first, you saw only the big picture. But with concentration, hidden objects finally came into focus—because you were *looking* for them. And remember when you were a teenager at a sporting event or busy shopping mall swarming with people of all ages? You didn’t notice the little kids, the families or the old folks, but you did notice teenagers of the opposite sex. Boy, did you notice them—because you were looking for them!

The point is we tend to *see* what we focus on. A good supervisor looks for both superior production and a safe work environment—two important responsibilities. But safety hazards sometimes go unnoticed—either because you forget to look for them, or because they become lost in the larger picture of production. Sometimes, too, supervisors lack information and training in the techniques of safety inspections.

Let’s call this strategy a “Hazard Hunt,” since the terms “safety inspection” and “safety audit” tend to remind us of OSHA or the IRS. Preventing accidents should be an internal process, and it has to be planned and *scheduled*. It’s not enough just to keep your eye out for danger. You must set aside time to focus on the work environment, and view your crewmembers with “new eyes.” Instead of looking for hidden objects in a picture, or a good-looking face in a crowd, your goal is to find and eliminate possible sources of danger.

Why the Busy Supervisor?

Shouldn’t the safety committee or safety director take care of this? A supervisor’s job is to see that the company’s work gets done! This is just the point. As a supervisor, you observe the work process and methods all the time, so who is better suited to identify unsafe acts and conditions? Safety committees and the safety director can help, but the ultimate responsibility for the crew’s safety lies with you, the supervisor, on a day-to-day basis. Accidents and injuries mean pain and suffering, morale problems, employee turnover, down time, disrupted schedules, and financial loss from both direct and indirect costs. Your job goes much smoother when none of these happen. You have a lot to gain from being a safety sleuth.

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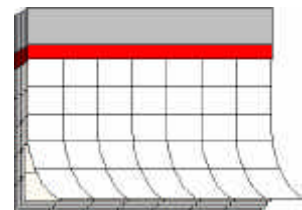
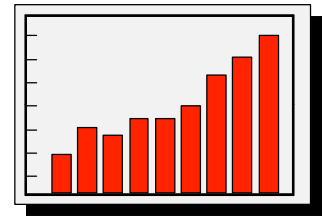
What to Look For--People or Things?

Today's work environments are generally safer than in the past, due to modern building and equipment codes, as well as safety standards that have evolved over the years, but nothing can be taken for granted. Every hazard in new industries or equipment may not have been discovered. Special projects can have unique jobsite conditions with dangers no one anticipated. The entire workplace environment should be viewed from a critical "What if...?" standpoint on a regular basis, including before the work begins. Supervisors should seek out possible worst-case scenarios, and be sure they are avoided.

Many supervisors and managers find it easier to inspect *things* rather than to observe employee work practices. Humans, however, are often at the root of safety problems. Over 90% of all serious injuries are said to be caused by unsafe acts and poor work practices. Some people become careless, hasty, distracted or fatigued—or let their work area resemble a teenager's bedroom. Poor attitudes, poor choices, and bad habits leave workers wide open to accidents and injuries, even if the environment *is* basically safe. Little is gained if safe work practices are established, but aren't monitored and enforced. Who else but supervisors should do this?

Plan and Prioritize the Hazard Hunt:

1. Look At Your Own Accident History. What kinds of incidents and injuries have taken place in your company, and especially in your own operation, during the past year? Knowing this can help you focus your time and attention on conditions and behaviors that have the greatest probability of causing an accident. Review loss runs, accident reports, or your OSHA log. Look for patterns in the type of accident, cause of accident, body parts injured, time of day, etc.
2. Be Familiar With Safety and Health Codes. Knowledge of safety standards helps you anticipate and avoid known, potentially dangerous, situations. But who can know *all* the safety codes!! Have the codebooks handy, and know how to look things up, but concentrate on thoroughly learning those standards that are relevant to the source of your losses. Use resources available to you such as the safety committee and your safety director, if applicable.
3. Review Job Hazard Analyses (JHAs). Chances are, any JHAs that have been done in the past involve high-risk tasks. These analyses not only pinpoint the hazards, they list which accident prevention strategies should be in place as a reminder of what you should look for. Make good use of those JHAs, or develop them. They have real value.
4. Know Your Foremen and Your Workers. Do any of your foremen tend to be lax about safety standards? Which groups seem to have poor production or low morale? Which individuals tend to work carelessly, are always rushing, or have repeated accidents? These clues will suggest which employees are likely to have mishaps. Make personal safety contacts to check out these matters. This is often more important than looking for "things" out of order.
5. Allocate Your Inspection Time. Spend more time in locations of the work environment where known hazards exist, where past incidents have taken place, and where you anticipate issues. All areas of the operation probably do not warrant the same amount of time and attention. Prioritize your focus and your time.
6. Vary Your Inspection Schedule. If you are responsible for a large operation, sample conditions in one or more smaller sections periodically, rather than trying to survey the entire area every time. Some sections or work groups may deserve your attention frequently, others only now and then.



You'll Do a Better Job with a Checklist:

An appropriate checklist provides your focus at the beginning of a hazard hunt and gives you a sense of closure when you finish. Inspection checklists come in many forms and serve many functions, such as:

- √ A reminder of what to look for;
- √ A record of what has and has not been inspected;
- √ An on-the-spot recording of all findings;
- √ A record of issues to share with management or the safety committee;
- √ Information for follow-up corrective action;
- √ Documentation, showing that your company strives to provide a safe environment for employees.



Choose Your Hunting Weapon:

- ◆ **Simple Area Inspection Forms:** These often consist of one column for the location being observed, one column for what was seen and a third column for comments or needed action. Simple forms are often most appealing, since they seem to be easier to work with. The problem is, they usually don't list specific things to look for. If you become distracted or interrupted during the walk-around, which is common, you may forget what you've observed. Remember, like the hidden objects in the picture, some hazards are easily overlooked.
- ◆ **Customized Checklists:** It's easy to find a specific safety checklist for a shop, yard, office, warehouse, marine terminal, etc. Checklists for vehicles or heavy equipment may focus on daily or weekly maintenance needs. Even the complicated operations on a construction site can be categorized on inspection forms that make a huge task manageable. Once you've analyzed the hazards in your own operation, you'll know which checklists will be most useful for you. Customized checklists are efficient because they do part of the thinking for you—the part that says, "Now, what is it I'm looking for?" When you're finished, you'll feel more confident that your sleuthing has covered all the bases, and you can move on to other important aspects of your job. Two sample checklists are included with this article.
- ◆ **Scoring Systems:** Many checklists provide a place to record *Satisfactory*, *Unsatisfactory*, or *Not Applicable*, including room for comments or action items. A few of these use a more complex scoring system, so results of safety inspections can be monitored over time or compared with other divisions of the company. For example, if housekeeping, machinery guards or tool storage conditions are found to be poor, they might be graded #1; whereas if conditions are found to be excellent, they would be graded a #5. The most favorable surveys would show high scores, while the lower scores might be cause for corrective actions and more frequent inspections.
- ◆ **Personal Safety Contacts:** Supervisors are advised to contact individual workers periodically, to discuss safety hazards and accident prevention on a personal level. Take notes about favorable discussions, disagreements about PPE, or commendable performances you see. Otherwise, you're sure to forget most of those encounters. You don't need a formal checklist for this. A few words written on a scrap of paper afterwards and placed in a file folder can do the trick. Now and then you can sort through the folder, follow-up on problem situations and give a little praise for those who deserve it. Notes like this can also help make annual employee performance reviews easier and more meaningful, if you are asked to do them.

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Make It a Hunting Party:

Just as a company's safety director can't be a one-person safety program, supervisors need not do all the inspections single-handedly. Group efforts not only provide more "eyes," but they make more of an impression on the workforce. Invite a manager or division head to do a walk-around with you now and then. Select one or two employees to go with you, as a break from their normal routine, and rotate who is chosen to participate. Point out unsafe acts and show how they could lead to injuries. Suggest ways those unsafe acts could be prevented. Discuss whether more safety training is needed.

It may be more efficient to divide up areas that need to be surveyed and let different people concentrate on different territories or focus upon specific types of hazards. It's usually best if two or more people work together. If you let your crew members fill out the checklists, they'll learn what to look for, and perhaps discover ways to make your checklists more complete. Hazard hunting can be a learning experience for everyone.

Work With the Safety Committee:

These ideas are not meant to undermine the safety committee's important role, but to enhance it. If one of a company's supervisors joins the safety committee during its inspections, the committee will take more interest in the process. But the safety committee can never *substitute* for a supervisor's attention to accident prevention. They each compliment each other. High hazard operations have plenty of areas that need ongoing inspections. Determine goals and a schedule, divide things up, and share the responsibility.

Never Let A Safety Hazard Pass!

Always see that immediate action is taken when a safety violation or hazardous situation exists. If the situation cannot be corrected until a future time, be sure that employees are guarded from the exposure. Delegate corrective action and set a deadline for completion.

Follow Up On Suggestions and Action Items:

Employees may not be motivated to correct unsafe work practices unless they know their supervisor will check back. Tell them you will do so, and make a note to yourself as a reminder. If you've asked workers to report hazards or make safety suggestions, be sure to thoroughly review and consider these suggestions—or they'll stop making them. If nothing can be done about their ideas, they deserve to know the reason why.

Never Miss a Chance To Give Praise:

A hazard hunt gives you a chance to praise workers for favorable conditions, as well as to identify hazards. The goal is not to find fault and establish blame. The more you can bring employees into the problem solving process by asking what hazards they face and how they deal with them, the more they become committed to finding solutions. Most importantly, "Catch people doing things right!" as often as possible.



Behavior that is Rewarded Tends To Be Repeated!

(Sample) SHOP SAFETY INSPECTION*

Inspector(s) _____

Site _____

Date _____

	SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
1.	Stairs clean, free of grease and stored items?			
2.	Exits and aisles clear of debris and obstacles?			
3.	Proper waste containers for flammable or combustible liquids and materials?			
4.	Adequate storage areas for all materials, including flammables?			
5.	Outside storage areas in proper condition?			
6.	Power tools in proper condition and grounded or double insulated?			
7.	Power cords in good repair, not spliced or frayed?			
8.	Electrical switches & circuit breakers labeled and adequately covered?			
9.	Illumination adequate?			
10.	Ventilation adequate?			
11.	Sanitation adequate, e.g. bathroom, eating areas?			
12.	First aid supplies complete and accessible?			
13.	Emergency eyewashes available, tested and easily accessible?			
14.	Fire extinguishers provided in adequate number and type?			
15.	Fire extinguishers adequately mounted and serviced annually?			
16.	Parts washers equipped with fusible links in lids?			
17.	Face shields, goggles & safety glasses provided and in good condition?			
18.	Protective gloves, aprons, etc. provided for work with hazardous chemicals?			
19.	Hearing protection provided and required in noisy areas?			
20.	Grinders and shop saws equipped with adequate guards and shields?			
21.	Spare Oxy/acetylene bottles chained/separated by 20' or at least a 1/2-hour fire barrier?			
22.	Backflow preventers in place on cutting torch or manifold?			
23.	Bridge crane capacity posted; safety latches on hooks?			
24.	Safety rules consistently enforced?			

***COMMENTS/CORRECTIVE ACTION ASSIGNED:** (Use reverse side for additional notes)

(Sample) AREA SAFETY INSPECTION

Record unsafe conditions or behaviors that could lead to accidents, as well as conditions that deserve praise. Observations should be discussed during safety and operations meetings.

Work Area or Location	Unsafe Acts or Conditions	Favorable Observations

General Comments:

Inspection by: _____ Date: _____