

TOOLBOX TALK #3

SHOWING COMMITMENT: SAFETY WALKAROUNDS

How can a construction company demonstrate its commitment to a safe and healthy workplace? Try a safety walkaround.

According to OSHA, safety walkarounds have two main purposes. The first is to show management engagement. The second is to allow management to see firsthand how their organization's safety and health program is working, and whether it needs tweaking to better identify and eliminate hazards.



OSHA says a safety walkaround should be performed in three stages: pre-inspection, onsite inspection and post-inspection.

Pre-inspection

Managers and foremen should never walk into a safety inspection unprepared. Instead, take the time to fully understand your workplace's operations and be aware of any previously identified hazards. According to OSHA, pre-inspection activities may include examining past inspection reports, such as injury and workers compensation records; speaking to fellow supervisors and foremen about their concerns; and meeting with the workplace safety committee, if one exists. Additionally, supervisors should "walk the talk" by wearing the proper personal protective equipment during walkarounds.

Onsite inspection

When performing a walkaround inspection onsite, keep safety top of mind, and refrain from conducting the inspection in an overly large group – large groups tend to "stifle open communication with workers", OSHA notes.

Hazards to look for include falls, slips and trips, exposed electric, missing tool guards and poor housekeeping to name a few. OSHA advises discussions with workers as they are the ones who know the most about on-the-job hazards. Make sure workers know that foremen are not there to assign blame but to find problems and fix them.

Before finishing the inspection, create a list of hazards that need to be addressed and prioritize them according to the severity of the potential injuries that might occur as a result of workers being exposed to the hazards, the agency states.

Post-inspection

The work isn't over when the safety walkaround is complete. "Post-inspection follow-up is important to establishing your credibility as a supervisor who is committed to improving safety," OSHA advises, and "failure to follow-up can often stifle worker participation and enthusiasm, which can be hard to regain." The agency recommends preparing a hazard abatement plan that includes corrective actions and a reasonable timeline for implementation. Share the plan with fellow workers and supervisors and give them periodic progress reports.