

## ■ Identifying and Assessing Hazards on the Job



MANY WORKPLACES have something that can make you sick or hurt you. We need to make sure that the chances of your getting hurt or sick are reduced as much as possible. In order to do this, it is important to first identify and assess the hazards on the job. Figuring out what hazards are there and then determining which are the most dangerous will provide a roadmap for you, your union and management to get the hazards fixed and clear the path for you to have a safe and healthy workplace. Remember, the goal of any safety and health program is to make sure that you go home at the end of your shift just as healthy as when you clocked in at the beginning of your shift.

- Some hazards on the job are obvious. Broken ladders and icy walkways are plain to see.
- Other hazards are not as obvious.
- Some things *seem* to be dangerous but are not.
- Some things *seem* to be safe but can hurt you.

There are many different ways to identify the hazards on your job. We will give some ideas here for you to use. Feel free to talk to your co-workers to think of additional ways to identify and document the hazards on your job.

### ■ BASIC QUESTIONS TO ASK TO IDENTIFY HAZARDS ON THE JOB

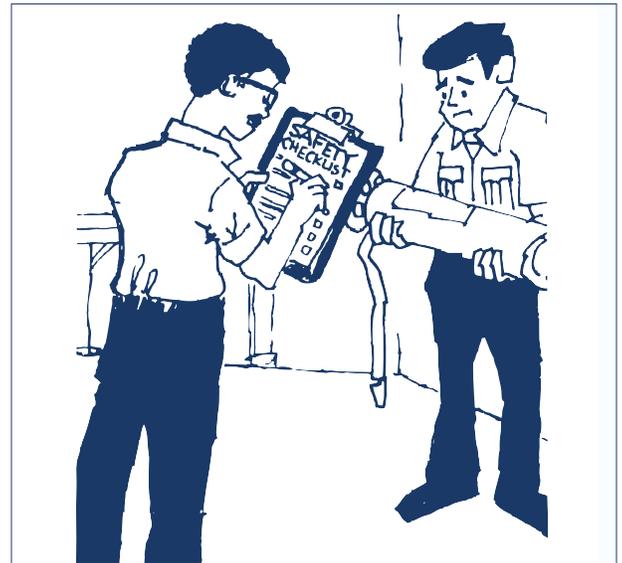
A good place to start in identifying hazards is to ask both yourself and your co-workers some basic questions (the 5 Ws):

**WHO** has gotten injured or sick? (You don't necessarily need to know by name, but it is important to note what job title, work location, and shift is suffering more injuries and illnesses than others.)

**WHAT** concerns do you have about your safety and health on the job? **WHAT** injuries or illnesses do you or your co-workers have?

**WHERE** are these injuries and illnesses occurring? (Which work locations?)

**WHY** are these injuries and illnesses happening?



**WHEN** are workers getting sick or injured? (It is important to note the shift, time of day, day of week, even time of month. Knowing when an injury or illness happened can help identify what the problem is.)

### ■ SURVEY

Getting the “5 Ws” listed above can happen in several ways. You can interview co-workers. You can hold a meeting and ask everyone these questions. You can also do a survey. Doing a survey gives everyone a chance to give input, and they can remain anonymous if they wish.

Surveys should contain mostly yes/no questions (with space for when and where). They should be no more than few pages long. They should have space for comments. They should have a place for people to give their name if they choose, or to remain anonymous. It is helpful, however, to have a place for job title, work location, and shift.

Once you get the surveys back, it is important to tabulate the results and to make sure that you give feedback to the participants. You don't have to give the answers to every question. You should, however, give information on the highlights of what you learned, and a plan for what you will do with the information. This can be done by holding a meeting and giving the results, or you can make

up a simple, one page leaflet with the results. Often just giving “bullet points” of what you found is helpful to your co-workers.

A sample survey is included in this booklet.

#### **INSPECTION**

In addition to asking questions about what everyone’s concerns are, it is important to take a look at the workplace AND the work. It may seem like the workplace and the work are the same thing, but that is not always true. The workplace is the location. The work is the tasks being done. For example, a warehouse may look fine at first glance, but when you watch the stock workers lifting, bending and twisting to move the boxes around, you realize that there are hazards in the set-up that can hurt their backs. (Almost every workplace has an example like this one. When you inspect your workplace and workers, see how many you can find.)

When you are conducting an inspection, it is important to use the following tools:

- Notepad
- Sketch of workplace
- Protective Equipment that is required for the area you are inspecting

And most important:

- Eyes
- Ears
- Nose
- Hands
- Brain

**Optional tools** Camera (if your employer allows pictures to be taken)

If you are observing either a PESH Inspector or if your employer is conducting “monitoring,” those inspectors may use additional tools including air monitors, noise level meters or other equipment. (See the fact sheet “Your Right to a Safe and Healthy Workplace” for an explanation of PESH.)

That equipment is useful to determine the *level* of exposure, but you do not need it for your inspection. Your inspection is to determine *what possible exposures* are present in the worksite.

If PESH or your agency is conducting a monitoring inspection, call the union for advice on how to best evaluate the job they are doing.

#### **RISK MAP**

Risk mapping is an excellent tool to use when you are both surveying and meeting with your members and when you are conducting an inspection of the worksite. Risk mapping is simply taking a “map” or drawing of the workplace, and drawing in the hazards that you find. It is often useful to color code the hazards. For example, everywhere there is a possible back injury hazard, circle or color in the area with red. If there are chemical fumes, color in that area in green, etc. Once you have the map, it will provide lots of useful details about who is at risk (by job title) and will help the union figure out how to proceed with the problem.

A fact sheet on how to do a risk map is found in Appendix B of this booklet.

