

CHAPTER 4

Inspections, investigations and surveys

“...The Reg 40 Quarries Regulations activity [inspections etc] we carry out on our sites and within our laboratories and offices has had a profound effect on management awareness throughout this establishment. It can be likened to a gentle policing, which minimises bad practice and supports the welfare of the employees. The success is measured by the lessening number and severity of issues arising as time progresses.

Without this system dangerous occurrences would have to arise to validate the need for safety measures to be put in place, as was the former practice...”

Unite safety rep working in the quarry sector in the South West

A major part of the safety rep's role is to carry out inspections.

These inspections are in two main areas;

- Carry out inspections of the workplace at least once every three months.
- Inspect any documents the employer is legally required to keep on matters of health, safety and welfare at work. Arrangements for three-monthly and more frequent inspections will need to be agreed with employers. These matters are often best dealt with at the workplace level. Issues to be discussed include:
 - The need for more frequent inspections of high risk or rapidly changing areas of work activity.
 - Notice and timing of formal inspections by safety reps and how many safety reps will be involved.
 - The possibility of breaking up workplace wide formal inspections into smaller, more manageable inspections.
 - The need for different groups of safety reps to carry out inspections in different parts of the workplace.
 - The type of inspection to be carried out, such as safety tours, sampling, surveys or mapping.
 - The enlistment by safety reps of independent technical advisers.

Formal inspections are no substitute for daily observations. However they provide a useful opportunity to carry out a full-scale examination of all

or part of the workplace, including inspection of documents required by health and safety legislation such as certificates concerning the testing of equipment. During these inspections, safety reps can network with other safety reps and discuss remedial action with their employer.

During inspections following notifiable accidents or dangerous occurrences, employers are not legally obliged to be present while safety reps consult their members. There may of course be occasions when safety reps do not wish employers to be present. The regulations do not preclude the employer or their representatives from being present.

Safety reps should also be permitted to take samples of any substance used at work for independent analysis outside the workplace. Safety reps should take appropriate precautions when taking samples.

Following an inspection, safety reps should complete an inspection report, recording the date, time and details of an inspection. One copy of the completed form should be sent to the employer and one copy should be retained by the safety rep for their own records and for reference during the safety committee discussions.

The results can help to show employers areas where they should be prioritising. When an actual or potential hazard is identified, the employer has a legal responsibility to assess and control the hazard.

Inspection activities can also help the union and safety reps identify campaigning issues and, importantly, show members that Unite is actively taking up issues.

“At a recent meeting of the Safety Committee, I asked for a safety rep to accompany the management members who do a fortnightly site walk round, which aims to highlight any problems, including safety. We use this as a form of inspection which generally covers the entire factory. I have stressed to the reps that this does not mean that they cannot still issue a one month’s notice to inspect an area of the factory (or do the same after an accident)”

Senior safety rep at a paper label manufacturing site in the North East

Prepare for the inspection

- Inform members in advance of an inspection so that any problems they experience can be noted.
- When inspecting unfamiliar areas have a plan of the area and information on the work carried out there.
- Inspect all aspects of the working environment, working methods and conditions.
- Have a checklist to cover all relevant health and safety issues.
- Look at working areas and talk to those working there to identify if there are hazards present and the risks. Not all hazards will be obvious, for example stress – but also be aware this could be a sensitive issue.
- Make notes on any problems to write up later in a report.

Unite Action: reporting near misses in food manufacturing – Midlands

A Unite Safety Rep working in food factory in the Midlands devised a “Hazard Spotting Programme” with support from his management and initiated a recruitment campaign for volunteer safety representatives. Unite provided on-site training for these safety representatives.

Safety reps carrying out their regular inspections report hazards to their line manager and this information is recorded on a spread sheet. Remedial action can be monitored directly by the safety representatives concerned, so they feel fully involved in the process. The programme also raised awareness amongst employees who feel more able to raise health and safety concerns without fear of blame. As a result, there has been a fivefold increase in near miss reporting and 75 per cent of reported hazards issues were resolved through the ongoing programme.

This safety rep’s achievement was recognised in the food and drink manufacturing health and safety awards 2010

Inspection not risk assessment

Safety reps should not confuse workplace inspections with risk assessments. Inspections only seek to identify hazards and problems. Risk assessments are more wide ranging and identify hazards, evaluate the risks, record findings, recommend precautions and review progress. Management is legally responsible for carry out risk

assessments. Unite encourages safety reps to participate in all stages of risk assessment to ensure that procedures and improvements are implemented and working effectively.

Safety reps can use other methods to identify issues in addition to their powers to inspect and to monitor health and safety in the workplace.

Surveys

A survey can range from simply talking to members and asking for a show of hands to conducting a detailed analysis of statistics. A show of hands or a simple questionnaire is probably the easiest way to get information from members. A good survey is one that is clear, concise and easy to analyse. If it is easy to fill in you will get a better response and if it is easy to analyse you will get better and more comparable results. Remember a lengthy survey may take weeks to complete and analyse, so think about what you may need and what time you have available.

What to do

- Before you start be clear about who is to be the audience targeted and decide on the outcome you want.
- Keep it anonymous – members will be more honest and open if they believe their answers will not be tracked back to them.
- On the survey form ask for all the information you may need such as area, type of job, type of employment, shift etc – but keep it short and simple.
- Inform the workforce of the reason for the survey, how it is going to be carried out, how the results will be interpreted and who they are going to be shown to and what further action is intended once the results have been collected and analysed.
- Analyse the questionnaire or survey to identify the issues.
- Share the results with the workforce.
- Write a report to inform your management/safety committee about the issues identified.
- Work together to ensure that the issues that have been revealed by the survey are resolved.

Taking it further: Workplace mapping

The survey process can be taken a step further by using a method known as workplace mapping. Unite safety reps in hotels and supermarkets are using this method successfully. The HSE has also developed mapping tools, for example for slips and trips and body mapping.

What is workplace mapping?

Workplace mapping is a visual data gathering and reporting technique we can use to conduct our own “risk assessments”.

Mapping is a powerful organising and research tool as it:

- Encourages worker participation in improving health safety.
- Raises awareness of health and safety.
- Raises the profile of trade unions.

Workplace mapping principles

They are three types of mapping research tools which, when linked, can give a total picture of the effects that the work environment can have on our lives. They are body mapping, risk mapping and “your world” mapping.

Mapping is about getting people to discuss their workplace collectively – how it affects them and how to improve it – and provide the basis for action by the union or further research.

Getting together to discuss how their job is affecting them gives workers a chance to see if a problem is really a work problem. If one person has an ache, it's only an ache. But if other workers have it too, it may mean that there is a health and safety problem at work which needs to be solved.

Body mapping

Body mapping is a tool for getting members together to discuss how their job is affecting their health. It has been largely used for identifying musculoskeletal problems and ergonomic hazards but it is equally effective in documenting other health problems such as stress.

The effects of the working environment on our health are not always easy to work out. An inspection may reveal problems in the workplace but it may not reveal how work might be harming our bodies. Body Mapping is a way of overcoming this and identifying common patterns of health problems amongst members.

The body map is a chart showing the front and back view of a body. Using coloured pens or stickers, workers doing similar tasks on the same shift are encouraged to mark on the chart where they suffer pain or injury while they are working.

Hazard mapping

Hazard mapping is a collective effort and is designed to gather information about hazards. Members can make a drawing of their workplace and mark on it the hazards that are present, using coloured pens or stickers.

Hazard mapping can help to identify workplace hazards such as stress, chemicals, physical hazards, work design and biological hazards. It helps members to visualise their workplace and the hazards that exist. It also provides documentation that can be presented to an employer, inspector or health and safety committee.

Hazard maps can even be drawn retrospectively. So, using workers' collective memory, a map can be drawn of the workplace or department as it existed years before, and links between the workplace and health problems that have a latency period, such as cancer, may be established.

Investigations

Under the SRSC, safety reps are also allowed to investigate:

- Potential hazards.
- Dangerous occurrences.
- Causes of accidents and occupational ill-health.
- Complaints from members.

Safety reps can therefore, immediately and without formal notice of an inspection, investigate imminent risks. Following the investigation of a serious mishap, the safety rep should also complete a hazard report form, retain one copy and send another to the employer.

The employer should complete and return to the safety rep the part of the form that describes any proposed remedial action or offer an explanation. The safety committee should refer to this during their discussions of the incident.

Inspection, Investigation and report forms can be drafted to an agreed format to meet local needs. Unite has examples of forms and checklists for safety reps to use.

For some more information on investigation see Chapter 5.

“ We are getting the safety reps more involved in accident and incident investigations. We are testing a new form for recording accidents or incidents which the Shift Team Leaders are tasked with filling in and the forms ask questions like whether a safety rep has been involved in the investigation. Along with the Company Health and Safety Advisor, I have set up trigger points at which point a safety rep MUST be involved, namely if an injured person is sent home or to hospital, or if there is an incident which could be classed as a near miss or dangerous occurrence. This system will be kept under review ”

Senior safety rep, Manufacturing, North East