

What to do if a safety inspector arrives at the workplace



Oh no! You're working in Washington state and L&I just showed up to open a DOSH safety inspection. If you've ever been pulled over or sent to the principal's office, it feels about the same way and you'll have some of the same thoughts, such as: "I wasn't doing anything wrong!", "Why are they picking on me?", and "How much will this cost?".

Don't Panic!

Before we get to the reasons why L&I is there, it's important to remember our #1 rule for safety inspections – don't panic! The inspector is a professional hired to do a job. There are many reasons he or she could be there, so don't assume the worst. Just be professional and polite as you would with any other job site visitor.

Why are they picking on me?

When it comes to a job site inspection in Washington state, there are 5 main reasons why L&I will show up to inspect your work site or building. It can be as simple as your company name coming up on a random list or as serious as an immediate danger or an accident that has taken place.

ALL WORK SHOULD STOP when the inspector arrives. If the inspector must wait for an authorized representative to arrive, you could select a few workers to walk the site and make sure everything is clean and safe for when the inspector does their walk-around. Otherwise, no work should begin again until after the inspection is complete.

No matter the reason for the inspection, it will operate in the same manner:

1. Opening conference
2. Walk-around
3. Closing conference

The conferences are simply meetings. DOSH inspectors can wait for up to one hour for an authorized company representative to arrive at the inspection. It's crucial to train your employees on a) who is the authorized representative for your company and/or work site and b) to politely ask the inspector to wait for that representative to arrive. If you are an Approach client, call us as well! When available, our safety team can meet you on-site and go through the inspection with you. We can also assist with any follow-up items that result from the inspection.

The opening conference is a brief meeting to inform the company of the purpose and scope of the inspection. If the inspection is being started because of a complaint/referral, a copy of the complaint shall be requested. The inspector may request an employee representative, usually a member of the safety committee, or an employee elected by the employees, will accompany the inspector.

After the opening conference and inspection of records, the inspector, management representative, and employee representative shall proceed to inspect the agreed upon work area for compliance with DOSH/OSHA standards. The route and duration of the inspection shall be determined by the compliance officer. **It is highly recommended that the authorized management representative(s) and the employee representative(s) take comprehensive notes and photos.** The inspector may talk in private with individual employees, as well as employee representatives, concerning working conditions if it does not interfere with normal operations or the employee's safety.

Photographs may be taken by the compliance officer to record apparent violations or other hazardous conditions. During the inspection, company

representatives shall provide common courtesies and cooperation. If the inspector is questioning a process, make every effort to explain the process and why it does not create a hazard. A good faith effort shall be made to correct deficiencies on the spot. State facts only, do not guess on past employee exposures or when the equipment was last used.

At the conclusion of the inspection, a closing conference shall be held. Both employer and employee representatives shall participate in the conference. The inspector shall indicate the standards which may have been violated and provide copies of the standard, if requested.

Discuss what procedures should occur within your organization if a DOSH inspector arrives at a jobsite.