

Hazard identification and workplace hazards:

What counts?

OAR 437-001-0015

Oregon OSHA defines a hazard as “A condition, practice, or act that could result in an injury or illness to an employee.”



What is a workplace hazard?

Put simply, a workplace hazard is anything that can bring harm to a worker. That harm can be physical, mental, or even emotional—and it can vary in type. The *effects* of exposures to workplace hazards also range from minimal, like a minor muscle strain, to harm that can end a worker's life. Unsafe work practices and acts are the leading causes of workplace injuries and should always be included in any workplace hazard inspection.

When it comes to the workplace, “hazard” is a word that can apply to many different things. When you think of your workplace, what

situations or circumstances do you consider to be hazards in that work environment?

Why hazard identification matters!

Hazard identification is a key component of any safety culture, and one recent survey* found that nearly half (48%) of American workers would consider taking a pay cut for a job where there was a better culture of safety. And that number was true for both blue-collar and white-collar workers. The results are in—American workers care about the safety and health of their workplaces!

Peter Drucker, management consultant and business visionary, is quoted as saying, “What

* 2024 Workplace Safety Culture Survey (bit.ly/3E5q6if)

gets measured gets improved.” That concept applies equally to hazard identification—what gets identified gets addressed.



Workplaces can often rely on “common sense” as the main means of avoiding hazard exposures, but it takes *intentionality* to identify and correct hazards in workplaces that are often productivity focused. For example, what is “common” behavior to one worker, like wearing worn and poorly soled boots, may not seem too hazardous, but it could lead to a larger risk of falling. The lack of guardrails on the elevated platform may just be “the way it’s always been”—until a worker falls off the platform and sustains multiple fractures, or worse.

How can employers encourage workers to identify hazards?

- Emphasize the need for hazard identification at your safety committee meetings and ensure workers from every area are represented in those discussions.
 - Hazard identification training is required for all safety committee members. SAIF and Oregon OSHA both have online trainings available:
 - Common hazards in the workplace and hazard identification (saif.com/hazardid)
 - Oregon Occupational Safety and Health: Hazard Identification online course (bit.ly/41Sljd8)
 - You can also request assistance from your assigned SAIF safety and health consultant or email safetyservices@saif.com for help.



- Develop and implement a system for reporting hazards. From the classic “safety suggestion box” to phone apps that allow workers to take photos and geotag hazard locations, there’s a wide variety of available options.
- Develop and implement procedures for conducting workplace safety and health inspections, per the safety committee rule, 437-001-0765 (7), and rules for all workplaces, 437-001-0760 (7).
- Most importantly, have leadership staff model the value of hazard identification by ***participating and mentoring workers in that practice!***

Hazard identification value review

Identifying hazards is the first step toward eliminating or otherwise protecting workers from those hazards. Successful organizations invest in the safety and health of their workers. Having robust hazard identification measures is a great way to show that employers care about their workers.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- If you are just getting started with hazard identification in your workplace, consider motivating workers to list the hazards they see in their work areas. You could incentivize this practice by rewarding staff who submit suggestions.
- Review your hazard inspection process. Has it been successful? How could it be improved?
- Have your leadership staff and safety committee members consider the “Hazard identification and assessment” information in Oregon OSHA’s Foundation for a safe workplace (bit.ly/3XH6esj).