

NELSON & ASSOCIATES

3131 EAST 29TH STREET, SUITE E, BRYAN, TEXAS 77802

979/774-7755

E-MAIL: info@hazardcontrol.com

FAX: 979/774-0559

The Value of Both *Planned and Incidental Safety Inspections*

The prompt documentation of conditions at an *accident* site is a basic principle of accident investigation. This is accomplished by means of what is called a *site inspection*. In this regard, there are two recognized types of site inspections – the *planned* site inspection, and the *incidental* site inspection.

The planned site inspection is an inspection that is scheduled in advance to take place at a certain time and date, often weeks, months, and even years after the accident has occurred. If machinery is involved in such an inspection, arrangements can be made to explain and demonstrate how the machine operates, and provisions can be made to shut the machinery down for detailed inspection and measurement. If a premises site is involved, arrangements can be made for the area of the premises involved to be barricaded so that a detailed examination of the site can be conducted.

In contrast, an incidental inspection is not planned. An incidental inspection can be viewed as a random sample of the accident site. An incidental site inspection can reveal important findings that a planned inspection cannot.

First, incidental site inspections can often be conducted very soon after an accident has occurred before the details of the site which caused the accident are lost due to weather conditions, the normal “wear and tear” process that is always at work, or the well intentioned correction of potential unsafe conditions to prevent future mishaps.

Second, during a planned safety inspection, people who normally use the premises area being examined, or operate machinery, etc., who know the inspection is taking place, are typically more self-conscious of their actions, and either stop work, or work in a different way than they do when they are not aware of being observed. Thus, the inspector is not able to observe the normal activity that would otherwise commonly take place.

Third, because it is natural for people to want to “present a good image,” special preparation of the area (or machine, etc.) to be inspected may take place. This natural and normally admirable tendency can prevent those conducting a planned inspection from observing *things as they normally are*, which if observed on an incidental basis, might reveal valuable information.

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