

In association with

<http://www.worksafe.govt.nz>

What to expect from WorkSafe visits

Some small businesses seem to worry about WorkSafe, even though most haven't had any direct experiences with an inspector. Ask a small business that has, however, and they'll typically say it was a great chance to have someone independent take a look at their H&S practices.

WorkSafe inspections

Read on to get a better sense of what a WorkSafe inspection actually involves, what to expect, and what can make the process easier and more valuable for your business.

Step-by-step guide to inspections

The point of WorkSafe visits is to make New Zealand businesses healthier and safer. Inspectors are trained to educate and engage business owners about H&S matters. They're not out to get anyone, or give fines simply because they can.

However, if they see things that could harm people, they'll take the necessary enforcement action to keep them safe.

Prosecutions are rare. In 2013-14 WorkSafe inspectors did more than 11,000 H&S assessments – and there were only 117 prosecutions.

Typically a WorkSafe inspection follows a four-step process:

Step 1. Conversation

The inspector will sit down with you and have a chat. This is an open discussion where they'll be looking to learn about your business, what risks you've identified and the kinds of things you're doing to minimise them.

[How to assess health and safety risks \(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-assess-health-and-safety-risks/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-assess-health-and-safety-risks/)

Step 2. Observation

The inspector will then walk around your work to see if what they've heard from you matches what they actually see happening.

Step 3. Examination

If the inspection raises particular concerns, this is when the inspector will go into more detail to try to discover what might be causing an issue.

Step 4. Documentation

At this point the inspector might ask to see what kind of systems you keep. This could include anything from machine maintenance logs to training certificates for your workers. The focus will be on whether your systems and records support good health and safety practice in your business.

[Plans, tools and learning from incidents \(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/plans-tools-and-learning-from-incidents/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/plans-tools-and-learning-from-incidents/)

Not all visits are pre-arranged and inspectors are allowed to show up at a workplace at any reasonable time, with or without the owners being there.

If the inspector finds an issue

You and the inspector will discuss what needs to be done to address any issues. Sometimes the inspector will give you an **improvement** notice, which sets out what needs to change and a timeframe for those changes.

If there are more serious concerns, the inspector could tell you to stop using a dangerous piece of machinery and will give you a **prohibition notice**.

In very rare circumstances — typically only following harm or death — an inspector might give an **infringement notice**, which could lead to prosecution.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Speak up if you don't understand something, or want more information.

The more dialogue there is between the two of you, the more valuable the visit will be.

Expert view

Inspector Walker's 10 and 30 story

Inspector Walker has worked as a government H&S inspector for more than 20 years. In that time, he's heard lots of good and bad work stories. After an accident or fatality, he says he regularly hears two numbers being cited: 10 and 30.

"It's tragic, but almost without fail I hear people say 'It was only going to take 10 minutes' and 'I've been doing this for 30 years'," he says.

"Taking shortcuts at work and rushing to get jobs done is unfortunately normal for many New Zealanders. Also, many people have been working for decades without ever having had any H&S issues. This can get people into trouble, or worse.

"People think H&S is just common sense and that it's only other people who have unsafe habits and work environments. If they spent just a day in my job, they'd know that no matter how long you've been working, everyone is vulnerable — especially if they're not proactive or are lackadaisical about H&S.

"A massive problem is that people often think of H&S in terms of being compliant and legal. What they should be asking themselves is: 'How do I keep safe?' The effects of poor H&S systems can have devastating consequences on employers, friends and families.

"I really feel it's my duty to try and make people safer. I'd love to see people slow down at work and properly assess risk before starting dangerous tasks."

[What is 'reasonably practicable' \(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/)

[Worker engagement and participation \(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/worker-engagement-and-participation/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/worker-engagement-and-participation/)

Rating form

How helpful was this information?

Rate this

- 1 Star
- 2 Star
- 3 Star
- 4 Star
- 5 Star

"Rate this" is required

Additional comments

You must enable JavaScript to submit this form

Submit

Loading...

Related content

More

More

[Tips for great health and safety talks](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663)

[Check it out](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/great-toolbox-talks/#e1663)

[How to approach workers about H&S](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/)

[An essential part of creating a good H&S culture at your work involves having regular H&S conversations.](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/)

[Read more](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/how-to-approach-workers-about-a-health-and-safety-issue/)

[Keeping people healthy and safe](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460)

[See how with our visual guide](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/#e1460)

[What is reasonably 'practicable'](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/)

[There is a lot of misinformation and confusion about what reasonably practicable means.](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/)

[Find out what you need to do](#)

[\(/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/\)](/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/what-is-reasonably-practicable/)

Five steps for hiring an employee

[\(/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523\)](/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523)

[\(/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523\)](/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523)

[Here's what you do](#)

[\(/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523\)](/hiring-and-managing/hiring-people/overview-of-the-hiring-process/#e1523)

News for business

[\(/news/\)](/news/)

[Get updates for small businesses from across government about new services, law changes and more.](#)

[\(/news/\)](/news/)

[Read all about it](#)

[\(/news/\)](/news/)