

SAFETY AUDITS IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **What exactly is a “safety audit”, and what is it for?**
 - A safety audit is a review that identifies hazards and risks in an office.
 - It can help to improve safety programs, protect workers, prevent accidents, and comply with OSHA regulations.
- **Usually, your supervisor or manager will build an internal “auditing team” that will...**
 - Conduct an inspection.
 - Interview you and your coworkers.
 - Make sure your office meets
 - industry safety standards.
- **But sometimes, safety audits are conducted by an external company.**
 - In this case, their investigators
 - are in charge of the process.
- **There are three major types of safety audits, addressing...**
 - Hazard identification.
 - Compliance with regulatory standards.
 - The overall effectiveness of your office’s safety program.
- **Some audits tackle all of these issues at once.**
- **You can’t find solutions to problems that you don’t know about.**
 - Which is why the first step in any safety audit is a comprehensive search for potential hazards, called a “workplace analysis”.
- **This typically begins with a physical inspection of your work environment. The audit team will look for general hazards in the workplace, such as...**
 - Cluttered work areas.
 - Damaged or uneven flooring.
 - Insufficient lighting.
 - Any hazardous materials.

- **They will also examine tools and equipment to make sure that they are right for the jobs they're being used for, and that they are in good condition.**
 - The analysis can even include an assessment of the factors that are associated with the organization of individual workstations, and their ergonomic impact.
- **In addition to a physical inspection, a workplace analysis should also examine...**
 - Your office's policies and procedures.
 - How they might affect on-the-job safety.
- **Your knowledge and opinions are important to this process.**
 - While you may not be in charge of your office's workplace analysis, you can still help to make sure that it goes well.
 - After all, no one knows your job better than you do.
- **So you might be asked to inspect your own work area as well as equipment for damage or potential hazards.**
- **If you do find any problems during your inspection, it's important that you immediately report them to...**
 - The audit team.
 - Your supervisor.
- **After you complete an evaluation of your work area, an auditor might also interview you.**
 - So think about how you do your job.
 - Be ready to make recommendations about how it could be done more safely.
- **One essential part of a safety audit is evaluating the "systems of controls" in your office.**
 - These are physical or procedural controls that are used to minimize the hazards that are associated with your job.
- **They are called "systems" of controls for a reason.**
 - They work together to protect you, but that doesn't mean that they all function the same way.
- **In fact, OSHA's "Hierarchy of Controls" identifies...**
 - The various types of controls that can exist in a workplace.
 - How effective each type is.

- **At the top is the “Elimination” of a potential hazard, and guarantees that the hazard no longer exists.**
 - It can involve ending the use of a hazardous chemical that your office uses for cleaning.
- **Next is “Substitution”.**
 - If a hazard can’t be completely eliminated, your office can substitute it with something that poses less of a risk.
 - Such as replacing old chairs with newer models that are more ergonomically friendly.
- **Following “Elimination” and “Substitution” in the hierarchy are “Engineering Controls”.**
 - These are physical control mechanisms in your office that help protect you from hazards.
- **For instance, your office might have outlets with Ground Fault Interrupters (GFIs), which automatically shut off power if they detect an electrical issue, to guard against shocks and fires.**
- **“Administrative Controls” provide the next level of protection.**
 - These are the rules and procedures that are set up to make your office as safe a place to work as possible.
- **For example, some offices may only allow their employees to eat in designated places to avoid spills in general traffic areas, which could lead to an employee slipping.**
 - Requiring employees to take regular breaks to stretch and rest is another administrative control that can help to prevent ergonomic injuries.
- **Personal protective equipment is at the bottom of the “Hierarchy of Controls”, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t important.**
 - It’s just the last line of defense against injury.
 - It is used to protect you from the problems that might occur even though administrative and engineering controls are in place... not instead of them.

- **As part of a workplace analysis your supervisor will want to make sure that you're using the correct PPE for the work that you do, like changing copier toner, or handling packings in rough containers, and using it properly.**
 - You should also examine your PPE yourself, to verify that it's in good condition.
 - Gloves that have worn thin or don't fit properly will not protect you.
- **While you may not have had a part in setting up the controls in your office, it's important to make sure that everyone uses them.**
 - So as part of an audit you may be asked to monitor how the controls in your area are working.
 - If you find any potential problems, you need to report them immediately.
- **Office buildings can be very large places, which means that an audit team has a lot of ground to cover.**
 - So doing your own inspection of your work area can help to make sure that no hazards “slip through the cracks”.
- **Make sure extension cords are only used when they should be. They aren't meant to be permanent fixtures, just "temporary outlets".**
- **If you need to string a cord across a walkway, be sure you tape it down so nobody trips.**
 - Put cords away as soon as you're finished with them.
- **Check to see that all pathways are free from clutter. Blocked aisles can create an immediate tripping hazard.**
 - They can also prevent people from getting to safety showers, eyewash stations, fire extinguishers and exits... which could be a real problem in an emergency!
 - So you need to make sure that these paths are clear.
- **You should also inspect the furniture and tools that are in your work area.**
 - Look for any frayed power cords, dull letter openers or scissors, stubborn drawers, or unstable shelves.
 - All of these can lead to serious accidents.
- **While you're at it, take a look at your work area's setup.**
 - If you constantly have to move at awkward angles or make repetitive motions to get your work done, it could lead to an ergonomic injury.
 - So if you can make your workstation more “ergonomically friendly”, do it!

- **It is also important to know if there are any hazardous materials, such as cleaning supplies or ink cartridges in your work area.**
 - Make sure that you can identify each material, its hazards, and the safe work practices you should use when working with it.
- **Remember, if anything changes in your work area, such as the addition of new equipment, you need to make sure you are up to date with any training that you need to work safely with it.**
- **When most people hear the words “safety audit” they think about inspecting their workplace and equipment.**
 - But you can’t forget about yourself.
- **This "self-assessment", or "personal audit" is important too. To stay safe, you have to look at...**
 - How aware you are of what’s going on in your work area.
 - How well you follow safety procedures and protocols yourself.
- **Start by reviewing any “safe work rules” your company has to make sure you know them inside and out.**
 - They help you do your job more safely by preventing mistakes and misunderstandings that can lead to accidents and injuries.
- **So never ignore them because you think they aren't important.**
 - Following them is essential... and they apply to everyone.
 - Never skip a procedure because you're in a hurry.
 - Remember, safety is always the top priority.
- **As you continue your "personal audit", think about how well you know your office building.**
 - Are you able to locate all exits and fire escapes?
 - Would you be able to find them in the dark if you had to?
- **You should also determine where the nearest first-aid kit is located.**
 - If an emergency occurs, you won't want to waste time searching for it.
- **Make sure you know where fire extinguishers are kept too, as well as what type should be used in various situations.**
 - Using the wrong one could actually spread a fire instead of putting it out.

- **But don't worry, you don't have to figure all of this out on your own.**
 - Your company's safety training program will help to make you aware of potential hazards, as well as how to prevent accidents.
- **This could involve...**
 - Courses on general safety issues such as back safety and ergonomics.
 - Issues that are more specific to your particular operations.
- **It's important that you take these courses seriously, so that you are prepared for any problems you may encounter.**
- **Sometimes, no matter how careful we are or what steps we take to protect ourselves, accidents still happen.**
 - So part of conducting a safety audit is making sure everyone in your office knows what to do if an accident or other emergency occurs.
 - Although this may not be your direct responsibility, there are things that you can do to help.
- **First, check to see that emergency numbers are posted by all phones in your work area.**
 - This includes EMT, fire and police departments.
 - In some places you can reach these services by simply dialing 9-1-1.
- **If an incident occurs, everyone in your office should know the procedures to follow.**
 - You should start by helping anyone who has been injured get the medical assistance that they need.
- **At this point, the details of the accident need to be documented in a report so that it can be thoroughly investigated.**
 - Investigators will speak to other coworkers who witnessed the event to get as complete a picture of what happened as possible.
- **Always report any incidents that you witness in your office.**
 - No injury or accident is too minor.
 - They all need to be looked at, to determine what caused them.
- **You should report any "near misses" as well.**
 - A "near miss" is a narrowly avoided incident or accident.
 - After all, your company can't fix a problem they don't know about.

- **After you file a report, you should verify that an "accident investigation" has been started.**
 - That way everyone knows that the problem has been identified and action is being taken.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **A safety audit is a comprehensive review of an office that identifies hazards and risks to the people who work there.**
- **An audit will start with a “workplace analysis”, inspecting it for hazards, as well as reviewing its safety procedures and policies.**
- **You should be aware of the “Systems of Controls” that are used in your office, including Hazard Elimination, Substitution, Engineering Controls, Administrative Controls, and Personal Protective Equipment.**
- **Conducting an inspection of your own work area is an important part of a safety audit. You know your job better than anyone, so you can offer important insight regarding any potential hazards that may exist there.**
- **Doing a “personal” safety audit can help you determine how well you know and follow safety policies and procedures yourself.**
- **You should always report any incident or “near miss” that you see occur... no matter how “minor” it may seem.**
- **Now that you know how you can play an active part in your office’s safety audits, you can help to make sure that your workplace is the safest it can be... for both you and your coworkers!**