

## Best Practices for Safety Walk-Arounds

If you're a manager looking for ways to actively improve the safety of your workplace, you should consider instituting a safety walk-around program. By regularly inspecting the workplace in person while workers do their jobs—and following up on what you learn—you can discover hazards you would have otherwise missed and build an organizational culture that values safety.

Walk-arounds can become an important plank in your safety program. In a three-part series of blog posts, James Loud, MPH, CSP, identifies General Motors, DuPont, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Honeywell, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory as examples of organizations with safety walk-around programs.

**Before you begin your walk-around**, determine which areas and tasks in your workplace are most hazardous by reviewing recent injury and incident reports. Make a list of previously identified hazards so that you can confirm that they've been addressed. Meet with safety representatives, other managers, and, if you have one, your company's safety committee in order to get their perspectives on your most pressing safety issues.

Make sure that you know what safety guidelines you'll need to follow on-site. If the workers you're visiting are required to wear PPE, prep your own and practice using it correctly so you can set a positive example.

Finally, let workers know in advance when you'll be coming and why. Your presence will inevitably affect how they perform their tasks, but this effect can be reduced significantly if you give them warning and assure them that you're interested in an open, collegial conversation about their safety practices and needs. James Loud suggests stating explicitly that the walk-around will be fault-free. You're not going to reprimand workers based on what you observe, but rather look for opportunities to collaborate on a safer workplace.

**During your walk-around**, keep your group small—you should only bring one additional person, or two at the most, for each walk-around, so as to make yourself approachable and skew worker behaviors as little as possible. On entering the worksite, begin by looking for obvious problems like tripping hazards, missing machine guards, poorly maintained equipment, and blocked exits. Ask workers to behave as they normally would.

Next, start an open-ended conversation with the workers. Ask them questions like, "What is the most hazardous part of your job? What do you recommend to eliminate those hazards? How would you report an injury, hazard, or near miss?" Ask them if they or anyone they know have ever been injured at this worksite. If they have, ask what caused it and what was done afterward to make their job safer. If you notice a violation of safety rules or procedures, ask the worker why that happened—again, making it clear that you're not here to find fault. Take detailed notes.

**After the walk-around**, follow up on what you learned. Make an abatement plan that describes how and when you plan to address the hazards you found. In cases where more complicated efforts may be required, begin by establishing interim controls that can help to mitigate the problem in the meantime. Track your progress and share it with your colleagues. By acting decisively to improve your workers' safety, you can build credibility as a partner, build stronger relationships between management and workers, improve employee morale, and reduce injuries in your workplace.



### Further Reading

- Read OSHA's [fact sheet](#) on safety walk-arounds.
- Read James Loud's series on safety walk-arounds: [one](#), [two](#), [three](#).



## Know What to Do During Severe Spring Weather

Spring weather can be lovely, but it's also unpredictable. A mild breeze and light precipitation in the morning might become an intense thunderstorm before dinner. That's why March 26-30 is Severe Weather Awareness Week. Whether you're at work or at home, you need to know the hazards posed by severe weather and prepare to keep yourself, your coworkers, and your family safe. Common spring hazards include tornadoes, flooding, and lightning strikes.

**Keep an ear out for danger.** Be aware of municipal and/or employer weather warning sirens. When you hear one go off, don't just assume it's a drill. Furthermore, take drills seriously as opportunities to learn and practice your employer's safety policies and procedures.

**Tornadoes kill and injure people by hitting them with flying debris,** so the key to staying safe during a tornado is to find a sturdy shelter. Basements or other underground structures are ideal. If you can't be underground, your second best option is to find a small, interior room away from windows, such as a closet or bathroom. Get low and cover your head to protect from flying debris. If you're at work, your facility should have an emergency plan that defines where employees are expected to go during a tornado and how they should get there. If you don't know that plan, it's likely your coworkers don't know it either; if possible, you should ask management or your safety manager to make an announcement.

**Know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning.** A tornado watch means at least one tornado is expected to form in your area soon. You should check your supplies and prepare to take shelter in a safe place. A tornado warning means that one or more tornadoes have been found in your area and you need to take shelter as quickly as possible.

**You don't want to be on the road during a tornado,** but sometimes it happens. If you're driving during a tornado warning, even if it's for work, try to find a sturdy shelter like a truck stop, convenience store, or restaurant. Don't try to outrun a tornado in your vehicle. If you see one in the distance, change course and drive toward shelter. Never try to use a highway overpass as a shelter, don't get under your vehicle, and don't hide inside a ditch except as a last resort. If your car is stuck in heavy traffic, get out and run as far from the cars as you can before getting low. If you're stuck in your car, turn off your engine, keep your seatbelt on, and keep your head covered and below your windshield and windows.

**Sudden flooding** due to rapid snow melt and/or heavy spring rain can be especially hazardous for people who drive as part of their job. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), **more people are killed by flooding** than any other single severe weather hazard, and more than half of all flood-related deaths result from vehicles being swept downstream. These deaths can be prevented. Don't risk driving onto a flooded roadway or through flowing water—the water might be deeper than it looks, and the road might not be intact beneath the water. It takes just 12 inches of rushing water to carry away a small car, and 2 feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles, including your truck. Turn around and drive back to a safe location where you can wait out the storm.

**Lightning strikes** most commonly affect workers in occupations that require them to be outdoors, such as construction and building maintenance, farming and field labor, logging, pipefitting or plumbing, and telecommunications or power utility field repair. You can best protect yourself from lightning by knowing the daily weather forecast and keeping an eye out for signs of danger—such as high winds, dark clouds, or distant thunder/lightning. If you see signs of trouble, don't start any task that you can't quickly stop.

### You should have a severe weather emergency kit including the following items.

- A battery-operated flashlight, a battery-operated NOAA Weather Radio, and extra batteries for both.
- Important personal information: telephone numbers of neighbors, family, friends, and utility companies; insurance and property information; your family's medical information.
- A first aid kit.
- 3-5 days of bottled water and nonperishable food.
- Personal hygiene items.
- Blankets and/or sleeping bags.



## Asthma Mortality Report

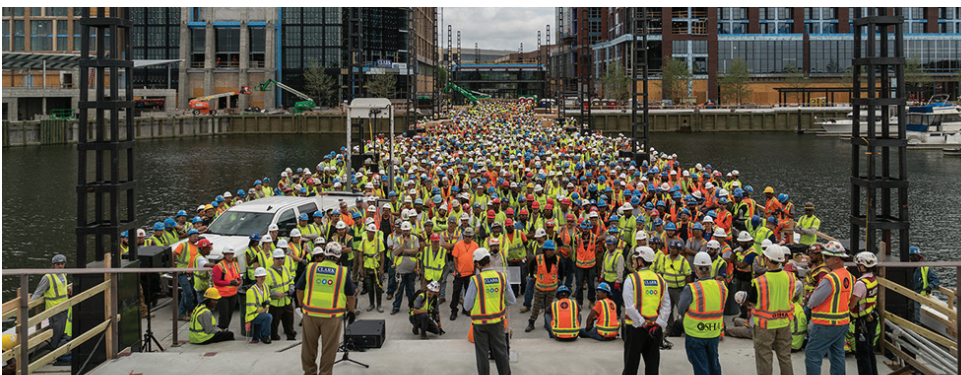
A January CDC report on asthma deaths among people aged 15-65 highlights the importance of identifying and preventing workplace exposures to asthma-causing substances.

According to [the report](#), a total of 33,307 people between 15 and 64 years died with asthma or status asthmaticus assigned as the underlying cause of death between 1999 and 2016. Based on an estimate that 11%-21% of asthma deaths might be caused by occupational exposures, between 3,664 and 6,994 of the asthma deaths from 1999-2016 might have been related to exposures that happened at work.

Women in health care and men in construction were the most likely to suffer industry-related asthma deaths. Men who worked in food, beverage, and tobacco products manufacturing, in retail, and in miscellaneous manufacturing were also disproportionately likely to die from asthma, as were women who worked in the social assistance industry or community and social services. The report suggests that the exposure to vapors, gas, dust, fumes, cleaners, disinfectants, antibiotics, natural rubber latex, welding fumes, and isocyanates (e.g., paints) in these industries may help to explain the higher asthma death rates.

Fortunately, the significant decline in the annual number of asthma deaths from 1999 through 2016 suggests that efforts to reduce work-related asthma can work. The report's authors point to the replacement of powdered latex gloves with powder-free natural rubber latex or non-latex gloves among health care workers as one such successful measure. If you work in one of the industries listed above, this is good news for you and your colleagues. It should be entirely possible to reduce and even eliminate exposures to asthma-causing substances in your workplace. You can learn more about work-related asthma from [NIOSH](#) and [OSHA](#) resources.

## Join the National Safety Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction May 7-11, 2018



Falls from elevation are a leading cause of death for construction employees. The National Safety Stand-Down is an effort to raise fall hazard awareness and save lives. Join the safety stand-down by taking a break to discuss the dangers of fall hazards and the importance of fall prevention with you colleagues this May 7-11. Even if your workplace is not subject to fall hazards, this is a great opportunity to discuss other hazards that do affect your colleagues. [Learn more at the OSHA event website.](#)



### Continuing Education Programs

Check out the Heartland Center's new [online events calendar](#) to keep track of our upcoming continuing education events.

Please also follow the Heartland Center on social media for regular occupational health and safety updates:



**Facebook**

[facebook.com/HeartlandCenterERC/](https://facebook.com/HeartlandCenterERC/)



**Twitter**

[twitter.com/heartlandcntr](https://twitter.com/heartlandcntr)



**LinkedIn**

[linkedin.com/groups/8420341](https://linkedin.com/groups/8420341)