

# The Primary Reason for an OSHA Inspection

by  
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What is the primary reason OSHA comes into a workplace to conduct an inspection? If you answered "Complaint", you would be wrong.

Below is a chart showing OSHA inspection statistics ending in the 2008 fiscal year.

OSHA Inspection Statistics	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	% Changes 2004-2008
Total Inspections	39,167	38,714	38,579	39,324	38,591	-1.5%
Total Programmed Inspections	21,576	21,404	21,506	23,035	23,023	6.7%
Total Unprogrammed Inspections	17,590	17,310	17,073	16,288	15,565	-11.5%
Fatality Investigations	1,060	1,114	1,081	1,043	957	-9.7%
Complaints	8,062	7,716	7,376	7,055	6,697	-16.9%
Referrals	4,585	4,787	5,019	5,007	4,855	5.9%
Other	3,829	4,807	3,555	3,183	3,056	-20.2%

## The primary reason an OSHA inspection is likely to occur is because it was programmed.

Programmed inspections are defined as: *an OSHA work-site inspection which is scheduled based upon objective or neutral criteria. These inspections do not include imminent danger, fatality/catastrophe, or formal complaints.* A programmed inspection means OSHA planned and scheduled time to visit a particular workplace.

This change in focus is probably due to a decrease in fatality investigations and responses to complaints. Programmed inspections allow OSHA to focus their resources on inspections with an "upstream" outcome, meaning they can correct hazards and exposure before an injury or fatality occurs.

The purpose of OSHA having programmed inspections is to attain maximum effective inspection coverage.

Workplaces subject to a programmed inspection are chosen from a variety of sources and reasons:

**High Hazard Industry.** This organization is part of a recognized high hazard industry due to injury and fatality statistics by SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) or NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) code. These "high hazard industries" have a history of serious OSHA citations.

**High Frequency Rate.** The number of injuries in a particular industry or company is considered excessive as recorded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics or other mechanisms.

In the absence of such information, OSHA will use the best available resources (i.e. commerce directories, commercial telephone listings, local permits, local knowledge, etc.). From this list, workplaces will be selected for inspection randomly.

How programmed inspections affect your business. If you are responsible for occupational safety and health in your facility or operation, you should be aware that due to decreased need for facility investigations (a good thing), OSHA has developed a more methodical approach to inspections of the workplace. If you thought that there are too many businesses and not enough inspectors, think again. As the focus shifts, everyone is more likely to receive a visit from OSHA.

But remember, just because OSHA is out there and becoming more visible, it doesn't mean that safety efforts are the only thing in place to merely comply with regulations. As we recently outlined in a series of articles, safety makes good business sense. If you have questions or concerns about your own safety program or would like a specific topic addressed in the safety corner, please contact me.

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