



# MAKE THE WORKPLACE SAFER

## ACTION GUIDE



## Introduction

The Labor Management Partnership between Kaiser Permanente and the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions is committed to eliminating on-the-job injuries. By working together, and involving employees in developing effective solutions to workplace hazards, we make Kaiser Permanente a safer place to work.

The Make the Workplace Safer Toolkit is a resource to enable frontline workers to identify hazards, develop solutions, and follow up on actions to improve working conditions. It can help you and your co-workers to:

- Identify a full range of potential hazards on the job
- Uncover underlying causes of injury and illness
- Assess the solutions needed to make the workplace safer
- Follow up to ensure hazards are addressed.

### What is included in the Make the Workplace Safer Toolkit?

The complete toolkit can be downloaded from [LMPartnership.org/workplace-safety-toolkit](https://lmpartnership.org/workplace-safety-toolkit). It includes four pieces:

1. A set of simple checklists, each tailored to the safety hazards common to particular jobs
2. A tracking chart (also found in the checklists) for following up on reported safety hazards
3. A Workplace Safety Primer, to provide core principles for reducing hazards and improving frontline engagement in workplace safety
4. This Action Guide, intended for safety co-leads, safety team members or frontline team members engaged in workplace safety activities; it covers the following:
  - **How to Use the Toolkit**
    - + Step 1: Identify hazards with the checklists
    - + Step 2: Propose solutions
    - + Step 3: Take action
  - **Strategies for Leading on Safety**
    - + Prioritize health and safety problems
    - + Make your case
    - + Know your health and safety rights
    - + Know the 2015 National Agreement

**Most workplace injuries can be prevented – and workers play an important role in reducing and eliminating the hazards that cause them.**

## I. How To Use the Toolkit

Active observation and follow-up will go a long way toward making your workplace safer. By using the Make the Workplace Safer checklists and other pieces of the toolkit, you and co-workers will be able to:

- Identify a full range of potential hazards on the job
- Uncover underlying causes of injury and illness
- Assess which solutions are needed to make the workplace safer
- Follow up to ensure hazards are addressed.

### FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

#### 1. Identify hazards

##### *Using the checklists*

Select a checklist appropriate to the department you work in or are visiting (Nursing and Direct Patient Care, Environmental Services, etc). Each checklist includes questions regarding specific problems in that department. Walk through work areas using the checklists as you talk with workers and look for hazards or “what can hurt you at work.” Also ask if existing controls are working and, if not, why. There is also a column for comments/solutions. Use this to keep track of your ideas as you do the walk-through.

**If any worker answers ‘no’ to a question, indicating there is a safety concern, mark it as ‘no’ and make a note of where there is problem.** Try to determine how widespread the issue is in the department.



**TIP: Complete different sections of the checklist in each walk around, so you have time to talk to workers. For example, one time focus on ergonomics. The next, on infectious diseases.**

##### *Worker Knowledge Section*

Each checklist has questions highlighting worker knowledge topics for that occupation. Use those questions to see if employees have had regular updates and training on hazards most relevant to their work.

This is not a comprehensive list of all the health and safety information or training an employee should receive. Employees should get health and safety training when they start employment, when they receive a new job assignment and whenever a new hazard is identified.

##### *Ask Workers for Input*

As part of your walk-around, talk to workers to clarify your observations and add insight. For example, ask workers:

- Have there been problems or concerns?
- Is there anything else we should look at?
- I’m noticing ... (specific problem) Is it always like this? What makes it difficult? (staffing, team dynamics, lack of resources, etc.)



**TIP: Visit work areas on different days or different shifts.**

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## 2. Propose solutions

Write your suggested solutions on the checklist and the Follow-up and Tracking Chart to make sure the problems you identified are being resolved. Also include, on page 2 of the tracking chart, the date you reported the problem and to whom (see below). This serves as documentation that you are trying to solve the issue within your worksite.

If you identify a hazard that could cause serious injury or is life-threatening, make sure it is addressed immediately.

Three weeks after you have submitted copies of your checklist findings and reported any problems, check on the status of the solutions you proposed.

MAKE THE WORKPLACE SAFER FOLLOW-UP AND TRACKING CHART				
NAME		LOCATION		DATE
Safety/Health Problem	What solution is needed?	Date reported and to whom	1 month follow up	Next Steps
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Is being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Not being addressed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know/Other: _____	

As you think about possible solutions:

- First, think about ways to remove the hazard. This makes your workplace safer and ensures all workers are protected.
- If that is not possible, think about controls such as improved equipment and tools, ventilation, or other facility changes to reduce the risk from that hazard.
- If that is not possible, think about what procedures or workflows need to change to reduce risk from the hazard.
- Finally, think of any personal protective equipment that is necessary.

Think about what changes you can make on your own, and what changes you need to partner with others—for instance, other workers, supervisors, facility management—to do.



**TIP: Work towards solutions that control the hazard, not the worker!**

## 3. Take action

**Use the Make the Workplace Safer Follow-up and Tracking Chart to see that changes are made.**

- Give a copy of your checklist findings to your supervisor or department manager, your unit-based team labor co-lead, and your department or facility safety team representative.
- Check in with them to see if they have any questions, need more information, and know what steps will be taken to address the issues you identified.
- Check your tracking sheet after three weeks. If the problem was not addressed, think about who should be informed and who can help you advocate for the needed solution.

Remember, at Kaiser Permanente, workers should be actively involved in both identifying safety hazards and advocating for solutions. There are many ways to get involved. For instance:

- Work with your UBT's Health & Safety Champion to keep safety issues high in people's thoughts and actions.
- Use the "Stopping for Safety" process when you see something isn't quite right, to stop the work until the safety issue is solved.
- Encourage people to talk about the safety concerns or questions they have, what solutions they think would work, and how best to advocate for action.
- Join the department or facility safety team, if you have one, to ensure safety issues are resolved.
- Encourage everyone to look out for each other.
- If a worker is being blamed for a safety incident, change the conversation to instead ask "Why did the worker take that action?" Look for the underlying causes of each incident.



**TIP: Keep track of dates and people.**

If the problem is not being addressed or you don't know the status, take steps to make sure it is corrected.

First, **talk to your supervisor again** – let him or her know you shared your checklist findings on (date), but have not seen the issue resolved. Suggest that you jointly escalate the issue to get help solving it.

- **Next**, if your UBT is not already involved, talk with the UBT co-leads about the problem and the steps you've taken so far to resolve it. Discuss with them how the UBT can help resolve them.
- **Next**, if the UBT and supervisor have been unable to resolve the issue, go to the facility or medical center Workplace Safety Committee. They are better able to address obstacles that impede action at the department level. It might be a problem other departments have as well.

## 3. Take action, *continued*

### Here are some questions to consider:

1. Who has power or influence to get things done?
2. Who is sympathetic and can help solve the problem or build your case?
3. Is there a co-worker who is as motivated as you to get the problem fixed?

If the manager or the Workplace Safety Committee can't help, pursue the issue with your union. There are several resources within the union, such as:

- + Your shop steward
- + Your Unit Partnership Representative (UPR)
- + The local Labor Management Partnership Council

As you plan your strategy, keep the following tips in mind:

1. Document your interactions.
2. Investigate what is needed to support your case for change.
3. Think about how your union leaders can help with information, ideas or other support.



### II. STRATEGIES FOR LEADING ON SAFETY

After completing the checklist, you may uncover many problem areas. Since resources and time are usually limited, it is important to think about where to start. Consider hazards that:

1. could cause serious injuries or health effects (are high risk)
2. are easiest to solve (so they're a quick fix)
3. affect the most people
4. people care about the most
5. may violate OSHA standards (is there a law that requires a solution?)

#### MAKE YOUR CASE

When proposing a solution, think about who is making the decisions in your workplace. Think about their top concerns, and how the issue you've raised speaks to those concerns. Consider the following:

- **Summarize the problem and how it may impact workers, the facility, patients and others.** Lay out the benefits of taking action, and the risks of doing nothing.
  - + For example, point out that workers can't provide the best patient care unless they are safe. This is a common goal with management.
  - + Is there a danger of serious injury? Does your solution help reduce costs? Will your solution make things easier for workers? Could the employer be an industry leader by addressing this hazard effectively?
- **Prepare what you want to say in advance.**
  - + List your options and review the benefits of taking the most protective approach.
  - + Write down and practice your key points so you feel comfortable with what you are going to say.
- **Humanize the problem.** For example, share a story about how people are being affected, or could be affected.
- **Get support from others.** Talk with trusted colleagues about your concerns.
- **Don't get frustrated.** If you don't succeed at first, rethink your approach and try again.

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## KNOW YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY RIGHTS

Workers have the right to a safe workplace under both state and federal laws. OSHA regulations describe what employers must do to protect workers from hazards, and these regulations can be useful tools when pushing for change at the worksite.

By law, employers must:

- Do everything possible to control or eliminate hazards.
- Provide training on job hazards and how to work safely.
- Post relevant signs and warnings.
- Buy equipment and tools needed to keep workers safe, including protective equipment (gloves, respirators, etc.) if a hazard cannot be removed.
- Have an effective safety plan that describes how they will identify hazards and work to control them.
- Offer a way for workers to suggest changes or solutions about hazards without fear of being fired or punished.
- Cover medical care and benefits for workers who are injured on the job.
- Follow applicable laws and regulations (called “standards”) that describe what employers must do to protect workers from specific hazards.

Because worksites are safer when workers are involved, the law protects workers who speak up about safety. Unions also play a role in supporting health and safety efforts.

**Workers’ health and safety rights can be put into three categories:**

- I. **Right to know** about workplace hazards; the right to:
  - » Ask for information about potential dangers, protective measures, and procedures for working safety
  - » Receive training
  - » Receive copies of information sheets, monitoring results, etc.
- II. **Right to protection** from exposure to hazards; the right to:
  - » Receive equipment and tools needed to work safely
- III. **Right to act** to improve health and safety conditions; the right to:
  - » Talk about health and safety problems with co-workers or supervisor
  - » Make suggestions for a safer workplace
  - » Report safety problems and injuries
  - » Refuse work that could put life in danger or cause serious injury
  - » Report problems to OSHA.



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## KNOW THE 2015 NATIONAL AGREEMENT

The 2015 National Agreement commits Kaiser Permanente and the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions to ensuring a safe workplace and to engaging the frontline staff and supervisors in safety. Section 1.J states:

**Kaiser Permanente and the Coalition believe that an injury-free workplace should be the goal and responsibility of every physician, dentist, manager, union leader and employee, and an essential ingredient of high-quality, affordable patient care. Working in Partnership, we are establishing the health care industry standard by setting the goal of eliminating all causes of work-related injuries and illnesses to create a workplace free of the risk of injury and illness, where people feel free and safe to report work-related injuries and illnesses.**

(See also Exhibits 1.J.5 and 1.J.6.) Your local contract may have additional language related to safety and non-retaliation.

### **Unions can advance workplace safety by:**

- Participating actively in the local workplace safety committee or team
- Surveying union members to understand their interests, concerns and priorities related to safety
- Training members on safety and health issues and how best to address them
- Using and improving health and safety language in collective bargaining agreements
- Gathering information from the employer about:
  - + The number and types of incidents reported at the worksite (reported in the OSHA 300 Log)
  - + Results of worksite testing (such as air monitoring) or medical evaluations (such as hearing tests)
- Filing an OSHA complaint
- Representing an employee in a grievance procedure; for instance in cases of retaliation for speaking up about safety concerns or reporting an injury.