

# safety bulletin

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## Managing an OSHA Inspection

OSHA inspections can be driven by a handful of reasons. The most likely is that a disgruntled employee or client complained to the local OSHA office and alleged that your facility was unsafe. Whether the complaint is baseless or not, OSHA must follow up on the complaint and verify whether or not a safe work environment is being provided to employees.

Other scenarios that might prompt an OSHA inspection include:

- A high number (and severity) of injuries, illnesses—or the unlikely event of a death—at your clinic, particularly if those events exceed the industry average
- A targeted inspection, which is directed towards high-hazard industries with above average rates of illness or injury
- A referral from a federal, state, or local organization
- A report of imminent danger (a hazard that puts an individual in immediate danger of death). These types of situations are unlikely in the veterinary profession.
- A follow-up inspection, the goal of which is to verify whether or not violations identified in a prior inspection have been successfully remedied or addressed



The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is tasked with ensuring safe and healthful working conditions for all U.S. workers. OSHA inspections are a fact of life in veterinary practice. Being prepared and knowing how to act during an inspection can make the experience go much more smoothly and can help reduce citations and fees.

## What to Do during an Inspection

If someone arrives at your clinic claiming to be an OSHA inspector, ask for their credentials. They should provide you with their name, ID number, the local OSHA office that they're representing, and the purpose of the inspection. After verifying that the individual is an OSHA inspector, notify the person responsible for the clinic's safety program. If that person is unavailable or has not been assigned, contact the most senior team member present.

The inspection will begin with an opening conference, during which the OSHA inspector—also known as a compliance officer—will explain the purpose and scope of their visit and answer any questions you have. Next, the senior team member of the practice will escort the inspector through any areas that pertain to their scope of interest. Never lead the inspector into an area that is not within the scope of their visit. Anything they see during their inspection is open to investigation.

Although anyone from the clinic can observe an inspection, it is important that only one person from the clinic does the talking and answers questions. Having a single point of contact reduces confusion and ensures that only accurate information is provided to the compliance officer.

During the walkthrough, the inspector will take photographs of their observations. It's recommended that someone from the clinic does the same. If the inspector observes—and visually documents—a violation and the clinic is cited, the practice will have the same evidence that OSHA is declaring a violation.

Conducting private interviews with staff members is another standard element of an inspection. The interviews are held to verify the accuracy of information provided during the walkthrough. Though the interviews take employees away from their job for a brief period of time, employers are not allowed to dock their pay or withhold their break as a result of time spent in an interview.

Once the walkthrough of the clinic is complete and interviews are conducted, the inspector will hold a closing conference during which they will review their preliminary findings and refer to any applicable OSHA standards. They will also provide follow-up procedures and feedback.

## Tips for Handling an OSHA Inspection

- Cooperate with the OSHA inspectors.
- Do not try to hide anything in fear of receiving a citation.
- Give accurate responses to their questions. If you do not fully know the answer, do not speculate.
- Answer and provide information to only what is being asked of you.
- If possible, fix any violations immediately.

## OSHA Inspection FAQs

- ▶ **Can the practice manager refuse to let the inspector/compliance officers in the clinic?** Yes, but it is not recommended. The compliance officer will receive a warrant from a judge and come back to conduct the audit.
- ▶ **Does the compliance officer need to show a warrant?** No, a warrant is not needed.
- ▶ **Can an employee refuse to be interviewed?** Yes.
- ▶ **If personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in a certain work area, can the OSHA compliance officer refuse to comply with the clinic's PPE requirements?** No, compliance officers must always adhere to the policies set forth in the clinics they are inspecting.
- ▶ **What can happen if the clinic receives a citation?** If a violation is recorded, OSHA will require a corrective and preventive action plan, the violation will be on the company's public record, and a financial penalty will be assessed.

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