



Kansas LTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Road & Bridge Agencies

Lessons Learned From a DOL Inspection

By David Ball, Riley County

Voluntary safety inspection uncovers areas of improvement.

In 2010 Riley County Public Works invited the Kansas Department of Labor (DOL) to inspect our new public works campus to help us create a safer work environment for our employees. I would like to share some of the things we learned in the process that I think will benefit most organizations that may read this article.

The topic of **emergency showers** is a good place to start as any. How often do you inspect and flush them? I was flushing them every two weeks, but the DOL recommended every week. Showers need to function properly when called upon, and they need potable water to be effective. Studies show that the seconds immediately following an eye injury or chemical splash are often critical to minimizing bodily damage. The presence of microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, and amoebae (or “funk” as I like to say) in flushing fluid can pose an added health risk to an injured eye. An injured eye is compromised by having less resistance to infection.

Extension cords were another item that caused us some grief. Are yours in good repair? Some of ours were not. Extension cords tend to get frayed around the ends. How about storage of your extension cords when not in use? Most county agencies like ours primarily use them in the winter to keep diesel engines warm. Are they brought in out of the summer sun for storage?

While on the subject of electric cords, also make sure your ground pin is in place. Some people have been known to cut off a ground pin to make it fit. That’s a safety hazard.

All of these precautions are of course intended to keep you from getting a “shocking” dose of electricity flowing through your body. The severity of electric shock depends on several factors such as voltage, the amperage, the type of current, the body’s resistance to the current, the current’s path through the body, and the time the body remains in contact with the current. Depending on all these factors, results of electrical shock can range from a mild tingling sensation to death.

Machine guards are another subject of importance in a DOL inspection. Guards need to be in place to ensure a finger doesn’t interfere with fan blade rotation, for example. This can be a problem in a variety of items, as we found out. In one instance we had an overhead furnace that had a big blower fan that was not a safety problem until we built a storage area just underneath it. The storage platform was high enough that the inadequate guard over the fan became a risk to somebody accidentally getting a hand through it.

Some everyday window fans have a relatively flimsy plastic face that can break, creating a space large enough to get a finger in. We had one of those.

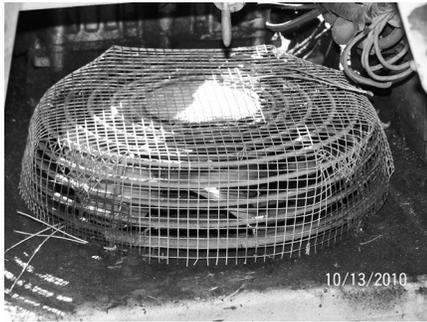
The DOL also found an older mower with spacing too large on its guard and a motor grader that was missing its motor side guard—it got knocked off and didn’t get replaced.

Planning is another necessary tool for safety. The DOL asked about our Bloodborne Pathogens-Exposure Control Plan, Emergency Action Plan, Lockout Tagout Plan, Confined Space Plan, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Hazard Assessment, to name a few.

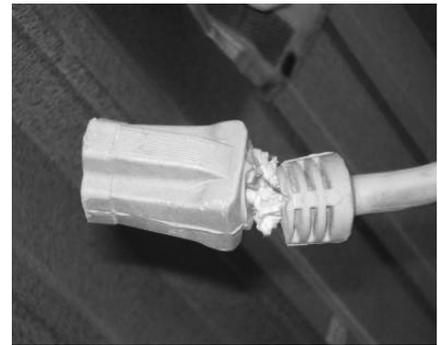
How about **labeling**? Does your agency have unlabeled or inadequately labeled containers on your shelves? Instead of a label to identify the contents do you remove the lid and take a big “whiff?” This method is old school, I know—I grew up with it; but the DOL frowns on it.

For example, the inspectors noticed an unlabeled clear plastic jug with a brown substance in it and asked what it contained. Hmmm, is it bar oil? Fuel mix? It was too thin to be bar oil... whiff... it’s fuel mix. (The DOL wasn’t impressed.) We also had unlabeled 50 gallon fuel tanks in the back of our pickups. Was it diesel fuel? Unleaded? A propane tank on the side of our oil distributor needed a label as well.

Knowing what is in a container is important to aid health care professionals in case of accidental ingestion or inappropriate exposure. A label also aids emergency personnel when they work near a substance during an incident.



Photos courtesy of Riley County



At left, flimsy fan guards do not provide enough protection for stray fingers.

Above, an unlabeled container is a hazard. Is the liquid flammable?

At right, damaged cables or cords can subject someone handling them to electric shock.



First aid kits and eye wash stations have items that have expiration dates on them. Creams wrapped in little foil packets, aerosols, and saline solutions all have expiration dates. The eye wash stations with the bottled fluids have expiration dates as well. Make sure you change them out.

Fire extinguishers need to be inspected monthly. Those tags on the fire extinguisher have space to write a date and initial when you inspect them. One DOL inspector stated that if fire extinguisher inspections are not being documented, then the inspections are probably not happening.

During our last annual fire extinguisher inspection, we picked up a fire extinguisher and the hose fell off. Thankfully this didn't happen just prior to being used in a fire.

Proper storage of your PPEs is also something that the DOL looks for. Ordinarily, face shields are hung on the equipment that require them. Unfortunately, though, face masks get dirty and scratched when left out. On our inspection day, we found a pair of safety glasses lying on the floor. I think the wind blew them off their perch when the overhead doors were open, but nevertheless...

One final inspection item: We had some mezzanines and overhead storage areas that had no **weight limit signs** posted. Getting that information was not a problem for the newer buildings because the load limits were written on the building plans. However, some of the older areas required bringing in an engineer to determine the weight limits.

In conclusion, safety is something we need to stress to our employees and it needs to be practiced 24/7. It includes considerations large and small. I hope this article will inspire your agency to look around to see how you can improve safety for your employees. You can invite the DOL to inspect your facility, too. It's free with their Safety Consultation Program and you will likely learn a lot. The DOL can be reached at (785) 296-4386. Another option would be to contact your insurance policy holder and see if they have any safety inspection options available to you.

At a recent conference I heard a speaker say that safety really started to make sense to him when he became a father. He related how an accident may have one in one million odds, but the problem is the one. Would he want his child practicing unsafe habits and become "the one?" No way. Have a safe 2012. ■

David Ball is the safety coordinator for Riley County Public Works.

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