



ARTICLE

What HSE Inspectors Actually Look For

Insights from our consultants on the issues that most often trigger improvement and prohibition notices — and how to be ready.

The visit itself

Inspectors can enter workplaces at any reasonable time without an appointment. They may inspect, photograph, take samples, require documents and interview staff. Since Fee for Intervention was introduced, if they identify a material breach you will be charged an hourly rate for their time investigating and following it up — so the cost of an untidy site is no longer theoretical.

The first five minutes

Experienced inspectors form a view very quickly. What they see in the first few minutes decides how deep they dig.

- Housekeeping and material storage — the fastest proxy for management control.
- Edge protection, ladders and access equipment in use right now.
- Whether people are wearing what the signage says they should be.
- Segregation of plant and pedestrians at the gate.
- Whether the welfare facilities are clean and actually being used.

The documents most often requested

Document	What good looks like
Risk assessments	Site-specific, dated, reviewed, signed by the people doing the work — not a generic template with a changed cover page.
Method statements	Match the actual sequence being worked on site today.
Training records	In date, with copies of certificates and a matrix showing who can do what.
Statutory inspections	LOLER thorough examinations, scaffold handovers and weekly checks, PUWER records, electrical certification.
Accident book / RIDDOR	Consistent, investigated, with actions closed out.
Health surveillance	Where noise, vibration, dust or respiratory sensitisers are present.

The breaches that most commonly trigger notices

- **Work at height** — unprotected edges, misuse of ladders, unsafe scaffolds and incomplete handover tags.



- **Respirable dust** — cutting and grinding without water suppression or on-tool extraction.
- **Asbestos** — no management survey or register before refurbishment work begins.
- **Plant and pedestrians** — no segregation, no banksman, poor reversing controls.
- **Excavations and services** — no shoring, no CAT scan, no permit.
- **Welfare** — insufficient or unmaintained facilities, particularly on smaller sites.

How to be ready

- Keep one indexed folder — physical or digital — that answers every request above in under ten minutes.
- Nominate and brief the person who will host an unannounced visit, plus a deputy.
- Record the inspector's name, warrant details and everything discussed; ask for a copy of any photographs.
- Never guess an answer. Commit to providing it in writing, and then actually do so.
- Treat any verbal advice as an action with an owner and a date.

Blackstone Safety Group offers unannounced mock inspections that mirror the HSE approach, with a prioritised action plan delivered within 48 hours.