

Avoid Hostile Encounters in the Field

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Even when things are going well, running a business can be stressful for both owners and managers. While routine inspections are a part of owning an operation, it may increase stress and, on rare occasions, may be misdirected towards a weights and measures inspector. The best way for an inspector to deal with a potentially confrontational encounter in the field is to avoid it from happening. Below are six tips to help prevent difficult encounters:

1) Introduce Yourself: For routine inspections, introduce yourself to the owner/manager. Most of them likely see many different government inspectors and may not recognize you, even if you have been there before. Showing credentials can be a great icebreaker. This also applies to jurisdictions that keep their credentials in plain view during inspections.

2) Be neat and tidy: Whether at a test location or using the restroom, leave as is or better than you found it. Leaving a mess behind will likely be noticed and often leaves a bad impression. This applies even if the establishment messy to begin with.

3) Avoid piling on: If you arrive at an establishment to perform a routine inspection and find emergency vehicles out front, consider coming back at another time. Clearly, the owner/manager has their hands full, and the additional stress may be unnecessary. If you do postpone testing, it may be a good idea to let the owner/manager know that you were there when the emergency took place and that you can come back at a more opportune time.

4) Maintain neutrality when delivering bad news: If your testing gives failures that will result in bad news for the owner/manager such as official orders or penalties, use direct eye contact and maintain neutral body language when delivering the news. Ordering devices repaired or commodities off-sale costs the owner/manager time and money. During these situations, it is crucial to be professional and courteous.

5) Cooling-off periods: If you are at an establishment and someone you are working with or around is upset about something and shows signs of hostility, consider walking away and allowing a cooling-off period. It is a good idea to alert the owner/manager of the situation. This is often a difficult call to make since you have a job to do. However, you also do not want to contribute to an avoidable hostile encounter. You should also notify your supervisor of the circumstances and follow their protocols for these situations.

6) Know when to call for help: Being verbally abused or physically threatened by an employee or owner/manager is not acceptable and must not be tolerated. If possible, leave the premises immediately. If you cannot, contact your supervisor or, if warranted, call the police.

Weights and measures inspectors have the unique opportunity to visit various establishments and meet many different people. While most inspections are pleasant experiences, there is always the risk of a hostile encounter. Being familiar with your department protocols and having the right mindset can help avoid escalation and can go a long way towards keeping yourself safe in the field.