

Cannabis Facility Safety Awareness

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Medical marijuana assists individuals with a variety of medical issues and, depending on your location nationally, is being sold recreationally. With legalized cannabis sales increasing and a new industry emerging, it is important to examine the safety aspects that can impact certified inspectors.

There are three types of hazards we need to be aware of during the inspection process – biological, chemical, and physical. Along with identifying these hazards, this article will also point out some possible health effects, the proper PPE to utilize and potential controls to minimize or eliminate exposure to these hazards. Although this article is directed at the safety of the weights and measures regulatory inspections, the cannabis industry can also benefit from awareness of these hazards.

Biological hazards include the possibility of dermal or respiratory allergens. Some of the effects of exposure include skin irritation or an itchy, congested, or runny nose that may cause sneezing, coughing, or wheezing. With a variety of exposure levels, the best form of protection is long sleeves and nitrile gloves to cover any exposed skin and an N95, at minimum, respirator, or mask. Engineering controls, such as ventilation, can help reduce the severity and amount of exposure. Routinely performing good housekeeping within the facility is also a good practice.

Chemical hazards include, but are not limited to, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers. All of these materials can cause minor, severe, acute, or chronic reactions depending on the amount ingested and how the material is introduced into the body (by either inhalation, ingestion, or skin contact). Sound operating procedures at the facility regarding application of these products is the best protection from chemical hazard. Proper personal protective equipment such as close-toed shoes, long sleeves, nitrile gloves and eye protection are also important. Again, engineering controls, such as ventilation, can help, particularly with indoor grow operations. It is also good practice to avoid inspections during the application of these materials, if possible.

There can be a variety of physical hazards when completing an inspection. Compressed gases, regardless of their use, present an explosion or fire hazard. Always use administrative controls for the proper use, handling, and storage of these types of hazards. Occupational injuries such as sharp objects and hot/cold surfaces can lead to cuts, burns and/or infections. Routine inspection and labeling will help in reducing these injuries.

Walking and working surfaces should be labeled to help facility staff and inspectors be mindful of the hazards of the workplace that involve slips, trips and falls. Keeping a clean, tidy work environment can help reduce the occurrence of these types of events.

Electrical hazards include burns, shock, and electrocution. Routine inspection of wiring, proper labeling and PPE that is rated for electrical use, along with administrative procedures when dealing with electrical issues, can help to avoid electrical related injuries.

Inspectors and employees should always be mindful of forklifts and other machinery inside any facility. Situational awareness is key to avoiding accidents, along with seatbelts and PPE, such as high-visibility vest and hard hats. Confined spaces, although rare, may be encountered and with it the possibility of

entrapment, asphyxiation and/or engulfment. Inspection staff should avoid these types of areas when possible, and confined spaces must be properly labeled with caution or warning signs.

Anytime an inspector enters an establishment, that person should become familiar with the layout of the building. Find out where to go in the event of a fire, natural disaster, or extreme weather. Federal law requires businesses to post such areas.

Finally, workplace violence, unfortunately, can occur anywhere at any time. Some good protocols for establishments to have in place are security cameras, security personnel, lockdown equipment and “appointment only” scheduling for visitors.

Keep in mind that these are not all the hazards you will encounter during inspections. Always use proper PPE and do not be afraid to ask questions before proceeding in a situation where you may not feel comfortable. For more information regarding exposure levels and controls, be sure to look at OSHA standards, EPA regulations or standards, National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), and any federal or state codes or regulations in your area.