

WorkSafe NZ

Inspection Preparation Checklist

Best-of-Class Guidance for New Zealand Businesses

From ThinkSafe
For Better Workplaces

Supported by HASANZ-Registered Safety Professionals

ThinkSafe has supported NZ businesses for 9 years across 90+ industries

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This comprehensive checklist is structured around WorkSafe NZ's 2024-2026 strategic priorities, focusing on the areas inspectors emphasise most during workplace assessments.

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Understanding WorkSafe's Assessment Approach

WorkSafe inspectors use a 4-part assessment framework to evaluate workplace health and safety. Understanding this approach helps you prepare effectively.

Assessment Phase	What This Means
1. Conversation	Inspectors talk to managers AND workers separately. They're assessing if what management says matches what workers experience.
2. Observation	Walking the site to see if documented practices are actually

Assessment Phase	What This Means
	followed. They check if workers use PPE, follow procedures, and work safely.
3. Examination	Deep dive into specific concerns or high-risk areas. This happens if initial concerns arise or for critical risks in your industry.
4. Documentation	Reviewing systems, records, and evidence. Not just looking for paperwork but checking if documentation supports good practice.

Key Insight: WorkSafe emphasises education and engagement first, enforcement second. They're looking for genuine worker involvement and continuous improvement, not just tick-box compliance.

Critical Control Hierarchy

WorkSafe prioritises risks based on their potential to cause acute, chronic, or catastrophic harm. Understanding this hierarchy helps you focus preparation on what inspectors will scrutinise most.

PRIORITY 1 Catastrophic	Risk Examples	Inspector Focus
Can kill immediately or cause permanent serious harm	- Vehicle rollover - Confined spaces - Falls from height (>3m) - Machinery entanglement - Electrical work	HIGHEST scrutiny. Missing critical controls = immediate prohibition notices. Verification records essential.
PRIORITY 2 Chronic	Risk Examples	Inspector Focus
Long-term health harm from exposure over time	- Silica dust - Welding fumes - Wood dust - Asbestos - Noise exposure	Growing focus. Exposure monitoring, health monitoring programmes, and control verification required.
PRIORITY 3 Acute	Risk Examples	Inspector Focus
Serious but typically recoverable injuries	- Slips, trips, falls (<3m) - Manual handling - Minor machinery - Ergonomic strain	Expected to be managed. Lower inspection priority but still requires proper controls.

Pre-Inspection Timeline

Use this timeline to systematically prepare for a WorkSafe visit, focusing on the highest-impact activities at each stage.

4 Weeks Before

- ☐ **Review and update all critical documentation (H&S policy, risk assessments, training records)**
- ☐ Verify critical control verification records are current
- ☐ Review incident register and ensure all investigations are complete with documented corrective actions
- ☐ Schedule and complete any overdue worker consultation meetings

2 Weeks Before

- ☐ **Conduct internal site audit using this checklist**
- ☐ Address any critical control gaps identified
- ☐ Review and update SDS (Safety Data Sheets) for all hazardous substances
- ☐ Test all emergency equipment (first aid, fire extinguishers, emergency stops)

1 Week Before

- ☐ **Brief ALL workers on what to expect during inspection**
- ☐ Review likely inspector questions with workers (see section 8)
- ☐ Organise all documentation in accessible format
- ☐ Conduct full site walk-through to identify housekeeping issues

1 Day Before

- ☐ **Final site check: signage, access, housekeeping**
- ☐ Ensure reception knows to properly welcome and induct inspector
- ☐ Confirm availability of senior person to host inspector
- ☐ Double-check all required PPE is available and in good condition

Worker Engagement & Participation

WorkSafe's #1 Priority Area

Worker engagement is the single most scrutinised area during WorkSafe inspections. It's also where most businesses struggle—not because they don't care, but because they don't understand what "genuine consultation" means in practice.

WHAT INSPECTORS ACTUALLY LOOK FOR

Inspectors are trained to identify "tick-box compliance" vs genuine participation. Here's what they check:

- **Evidence of consultation BEFORE decisions, not just notification after**
- Meeting minutes showing worker input actually influenced outcomes
- HSR has time, resources, and authority to raise issues
- Workers can explain how to report hazards (not just "talk to my supervisor")
- Visible changes in the workplace based on worker feedback

Essential Worker Engagement Elements

1. Documented Consultation Process

- ☐ Regular consultation meetings (monthly minimum for high-risk operations)

- ☐ Meeting minutes that capture: date, attendees, issues raised, decisions made, actions assigned
- ☐ Evidence that worker feedback influenced decisions (e.g., "Workers suggested X, so we implemented Y")
- ☐ Action items from previous meetings have been completed and communicated back

✗ Common Mistake: *Toolbox talks where management talks AT workers with no opportunity for real input. Inspectors can spot this immediately.*

2. Health & Safety Representative (HSR)

- ☐ HSR elected by workers (if they requested one)
- ☐ HSR has completed approved training
- ☐ HSR given paid time to perform role (at least 2 hours per month minimum)
- ☐ HSR has raised issues and those issues have been responded to with documented outcomes
- ☐ HSR attends H&S meetings and has input into decision-making

3. Worker Participation in Risk Management

- ☐ Workers involved in hazard identification (site walks, pre-starts, daily discussions)
- ☐ Workers participate in developing safe work methods
- ☐ Workers can demonstrate understanding of critical risks in their work
- ☐ Near-miss reporting system is actually used by workers (not just management)

THINKSAFE INSIGHT: 9 Years Experience

After 9 years supporting New Zealand businesses, we've learned that worker engagement is where most businesses struggle.

It's not because they don't care—it's because they don't know what "genuine consultation" looks like in practice.

Common mistake: Sending an email asking for feedback ✗

Best practice: Structured monthly meetings with documented actions and visible changes

Critical Risk Management by Sector

WorkSafe's 2024-2026 strategy prioritises four high-harm sectors. Select the sections relevant to your industry and ensure your critical controls are documented and verifiable.

Agriculture (25% of workplace fatalities)

Primary Focus: Quad bikes, tractors, livestock, machinery

Critical Risk	Critical Controls	Verification Evidence
Quad Bikes / ATVs	• OPDs fitted (recommended best practice) • Helmets worn • Operator training • No passengers	• Photos of OPDs on each bike • Training records • Pre-start checklists
Tractors	• ROPS intact	• Maintenance logs

Critical Risk	Critical Controls	Verification Evidence
	• Seatbelts worn • PTO guards fitted	• Competency assessments
Confined Spaces (effluent)	• Entry permits • Gas testing • Never enter alone • Secure fencing	• Permit system used • Gas test records • Training records

Construction (15% of workplace fatalities)

Primary Focus: Falls from height, silica exposure, mobile plant

Critical Risk	Critical Controls	Verification Evidence
Working at Height	• Scaffolding tagged • Edge protection • Harness if >3m • Anchor points certified	• Daily scaffold checks • Handover certificates • Height work permits
Silica Exposure	• Wet cutting/water suppression • On-tool extraction • P2 respirators minimum	• Exposure monitoring • Health monitoring programme • Control verification

Manufacturing

Primary Focus: Machine guarding, lockout/tagout, hazardous substances

Critical Risk	Critical Controls	Verification Evidence
Machinery	• Guards interlocked • E-stops accessible • LOTO procedures • Operator training	• Guard inspections • LOTO logbooks • Competency records

Forestry (20× average fatality rate)

Primary Focus: Tree felling, vehicle interaction, steep terrain

Critical Risk	Critical Controls	Verification Evidence
Tree Felling	• Certified faller • Exclusion zones • Communications plan	• Current certifications • Daily site plans

From dairy farms to data centres, we've seen how critical controls vary dramatically by industry—but the verification principle stays the same:

Prove your controls work, don't just document that they exist.

Essential Documentation Requirements

Inspectors aren't just looking for paperwork—they're checking if your documentation supports safe practice. Quality matters more than quantity.

Core PCBU Documentation

Document	What Inspectors Check
Health & Safety Policy	Signed by PCBU/CEO, dated within 12 months, specific to your business (not generic language)
Risk Assessments	Activity-specific (not generic), reviewed within 6-12 months, show hierarchy of controls applied, evidence of worker involvement
Training Records	Current for all workers, includes competency assessment (not just attendance), refresher training scheduled, induction records for new staff
Incident Register	All incidents recorded (not just notifiable), investigations completed, corrective actions documented and implemented, trends analysed
Consultation Records	Meeting minutes showing genuine engagement, action items followed up, worker suggestions implemented, HSR involvement documented

✗ RED FLAGS THAT TRIGGER ENFORCEMENT:

- Generic risk assessments clearly copied from internet
- Training certificates without any competency assessment records
- Consultation records that show no worker input or influence on decisions
- No evidence of critical control verification (just procedures, no proof controls work)
- Documentation dated right before inspector visit (obvious last-minute compliance)

During the Inspection

Do's and Don'ts

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Be cooperative and professional	Be defensive or argumentative

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
Answer honestly if you don't know something	Make up answers or promise things you can't deliver
Take notes of issues raised	Dismiss or minimise concerns raised
Ask clarifying questions if you're unsure	Interrupt or talk over the inspector
Demonstrate commitment to improvement	Make excuses or blame workers

Common Questions During Inspections

Inspectors talk to workers separately from management to verify if documented systems reflect reality. While specific questions vary, these topic areas are commonly explored. Brief your team on these themes so they can respond confidently.

Typical Topic Areas:

- **Hazard reporting processes**

Workers should know how to report concerns (specific process, not just "tell someone"). May be asked to demonstrate or describe the steps.

- **Recent safety activities**

Questions about recent meetings, toolbox talks, or safety discussions to verify engagement is real and ongoing.

- **Practical competency**

May be asked to demonstrate procedures (e.g., machinery lockout, equipment inspection, emergency response) to verify training has been effective.

- **Response to unsafe situations**

Exploring how workers would handle seeing unsafe acts or conditions. Looking for evidence of stop-work authority and speaking up culture.

- **Health & Safety Representative knowledge**

Checking if workers know their HSR and understand they can raise concerns through multiple channels.

- **Training and competency awareness**

Questions about what training workers have received, when, and whether they feel competent for their tasks. Recent dates matter.

- **Emergency preparedness**

Basic questions about emergency exits, assembly points, and emergency procedures to check awareness and preparedness.

- **Safety culture and comfort**

General questions about whether workers feel comfortable raising safety concerns. Assessing psychological safety and organisational culture.