



Adam Carruthers:

First impressions matter, especially during a Ministry of Labour inspection. So what are the inspectors noticing the moment they step on site?

Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Adam Carruthers:

Welcome to the IHSA podcast, where we talk about real stories, real challenges, and real solutions in keeping your workplace safe. I'm your host, Adam Carruthers, and today we're talking about something that every constructor, supervisor, and employer in construction will experience at some point, a Ministry of Labour inspection. For many, that moment can bring a lot of uncertainty. What is the inspector looking for? What should you say or not say? And most importantly, how can you make sure your site is truly prepared, not just scrambling when someone shows up? Today, we're going to walk through what inspectors are really looking for, common mistakes that lead to orders, and practical steps you can take to make sure your site is always inspection-ready. To help us break this down, we're joined by Aris Finnson. Aris brings a really unique perspective with experience in construction as well as time spent as an occupational health and safety inspector with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development.

She's worked closely with employers, supervisors, and workers on sites across Ontario, so she's seen firsthand what inspections look like and what really makes a site stand out, both good and bad. Aris, thanks so much for being here today.

Aris Finnson:

Good morning, Adam. Thank you for having me.

Adam Carruthers:

All right, so let's gear up and get into it. So Aris, from your experience as an inspector, what's the main goal when you showed up to a construction site and what were you looking for in those first few minutes?

Aris Finnson:

Really as an inspector, the main goal from the Ministry of Labour's perspective is to really see whether the internal responsibility system is present. Is there evidence that hazards are being recognized, planned for, and controlled? Is there a competent supervisor who's actively managing the site?

Some visual cues that we're looking for quickly are of signage. Is housekeeping up to date? Is there fencing, sanitary facilities? Are obvious hazards present? Are workers using PPE? And of course the big one, fall protection. Usually on a site, culture is visible within the first few minutes. Distinguishing between isolated issues and ongoing systematic problems are really evident in the first little bit during an inspection. And usually inspectors have already done a little bit of a drive around to see what the site looks like prior to even stepping on the site. So, really the supervisors need to be planning for the work of the day but the work ahead.

So that's really what the inspectors are looking for in the first few minutes. Has there been any planning?

Adam Carruthers:

I like that, and I really liked how you focused at the start on talking about the IRS. The internal responsibility system really highlights the importance of having everybody involved, whether they're the constructor, the employer, the supervisor, even the worker has a role when it comes to health and safety in the workplace. Now as a former inspector, what were some of the biggest green flags and even red flags that you noticed right away when you arrived onto a site?

Aris Finnson:

As I said in my first answer, really the green flags are, is the site planned well? Is there a site trailer that is visible and well-marked? Is there access to hygiene facilities in the area? Is there signage about required personal protective equipment? Is there a muster point? On bigger sites, you'll see right away that they've done evidence of emergency planning, things like that.

You can tell right away whether a site is organized well. There's usually lay down areas and signage for workers about where things are. It's clean, it's organized. Workers are not ... This is always funny, workers are not running away. Supervisors are available immediately. They're engaged in talking with the ministry. People aren't afraid of the Ministry of Labour. Now don't get me wrong, I understand that everybody is intimidated, but if you have a good, robust internal responsibility system, if you are talking about health and safety, if you're planning it, if you're engaged in it, then generally you can tell as an inspector that they're not as afraid of what the potential outcome of that inspection could be.

Adam Carruthers:

I like that. And I really find it funny and maybe even amusing when you talked about workers scrambling as soon as they see the inspector arrives on site because my experience with the ministry is they're not bad people. They're there for a very specific role and that's to help keep people safe, whether they have supervisory roles and they're responsible for people's safety or just the worker in general that I need to work safe on a jobsite. Whether I have control of everyone else, I need to make sure that I go home safe. So I like that we're talking about the green flags, the red flags. Now, when we go in there and we talk about arriving on a site, what should that supervisor or the constructor do in the first 10 minutes after an inspector arrives on the site?

Aris Finnson:

Well, really be available. That's the first one. The phones start ringing. It's such a common joke that the ministry's here and everybody starts calling and panicking. And I would just say, meet the inspector, be calm, ask for the purpose of the inspection. That will give you a real indication as to why they're there and what they might be looking for. If they're there for a proactive, then they just want to have a look at the entire site and get a good idea whether, as I said earlier, that you're planning for hazards, you're identifying them and correcting them. But if they're there for a complaint, it'll usually be for a specific reason and they might do a full inspection, but they really are probably going to focus on a couple key issues. And if you ask them the reason that they're there, you can usually get ahead of the answers and know why you're there. So, if that came up in your last Joint Health and Safety Committee inspection, you would know to have that paperwork ready. But don't panic, don't be distracted, don't be on your phone. Just be calm, talk to the inspector, answer their questions honestly. We know that construction is a very fast-paced environment. As long as you're planning for the work, we know that things come up. We know that not everything goes to schedule, not everything is perfect every day, and the hazards are moving very quickly, but really the condition of the site will show the planning. So that we know that yes, there might be some small orders, but the big orders will be taken care of with good planning. So when we talk about fall protection or housekeeping, we know that if we don't see any of those issues right away, we know that you are already prepared for a Ministry of Labour inspection, which is great. Half the battle is being prepared. It means that you're not scrambling at the time when an inspector shows up.

Make sure that your site board is up to date. Make sure that you have that paperwork that is available for them to see your notice of project. That's the first thing the inspector is going to do to identify who the constructor is, who the supervisor is, and the actual location and address of the site. Have your worker representative or your joint health and safety committee member available. If they can come in the first 10 minutes, that's really helpful because they're going to want to have a worker present to make sure that they have a worker presence. That's really important to the Ministry of Labour, that it's transparent to the workers why they're there as well. We don't want to just deal with management. They want to involve the workers because that's part of the internal responsibility system.

I would say just be cooperative, be professional, continue managing your site. We don't want you to shut down the whole site. That's part of it is we want to see the ministry, and I keep saying we, but they, they want to see how the site is functioning. So if it shuts down because you're going to do an inspection with them, that's not really helpful. They want to see how workers are working and they want to be able to talk to them during that inspection. A big tip is don't become defensive or argumentative. You can have explanations for things, but when you start getting defensive or argumentative and you have lots of reasons why things are happening, it just doesn't show that you're really open to having them there. A good inspection is where you have an open conversation with the inspector about the hazards that are ongoing, how you're controlling them, problems that arise.

Every day you're dealing with problems and the ministry knows that. It's what you're doing about those problems that is really important. I think don't scramble to hide problems. It's okay, as I just said, things come up. And then don't disappear on the inspector. That would be a big one is if you need to get some information, have someone else go and gather that for you. Just stay with the inspector so that they're not left to wander on their own because you want to make sure that you also want to be seeing what they're seeing so that when it comes time to review the report, you're both on the same page with what the hazards observed were and how we can go about correcting them.

Adam Carruthers:

I think that's some really good advice. My experience going out on sites, especially my first step on there, the first place I would usually go to is the joint health and safety board. And what I would see is if the board is neat, it's organized, stuff has a home, everything is there. I usually would expect that I'm going to have a good visit, a good walkthrough with my team, with the constructor, with whoever I'm there visiting and helping out. If the board looked, lack of better term, like a dog's breakfast and it wasn't organized or stuff missing, I usually had an indicator that there was something on the site and nine times out of 10, that's what I would see. And I think you might agree that it shouldn't be the norm of having a problem. If the site looks good and everyone's working at heights and you come across one person not wearing a harness, not wearing a lanyard, it's not acceptable, but it's not the norm for the site. So it might become more of a conversation and have it corrected rather than a larger issue with the site, if you'd agree with that.

Aris Finnson:

Oh, I totally agree with that. You can tell right away, as I said earlier as well, is your postings and your signage really tells a lot about how invested you are in health and safety. And so that board being really important that you have the notice of project, your emergency contact information and procedures are very important to be posted, to be available to workers, your joint health and safety committee, if that applies that the meeting minutes are posted, the inspections are posted. If you're doing inspections, those are available. A big one that I would always really... I didn't really talk about it with supervisors, but if I saw a supervisor log book in the site trailer, that to me was a really good indication that the supervisor was competent and that they had to have training, knowledge, training, experience, but that training usually comes ...The training lessons that they learn is that documentation is super important.

So if I saw an *IHSA Supervisor Log Book* on a desk in the site trailer, that went a long way for me to give me comfort that this site is being well run and people have adequate training.

Adam Carruthers:

Excellent. So, at IHSA, we have those logbooks, we teach supervisors our basic supervisor training. Those are great for our supervisor, but let's talk about the workers a little bit now. So when you spoke with the workers, were there any kind of questions that you would ask and what kind of told you that the site was prepared during those conversations with the workers?

Aris Finnson:

Absolutely. The first thing is always, who is your supervisor? A big one for me, and was for me, who is your supervisor? And if they don't know who their direct supervisor is, how do they know what to do in an emergency? How do they know how to report a hazard? How do they know how to correct something that is out of their control? For me, that was a very big one. And then what is this the work that they're performing today? And a lot of times inspectors don't know every part of construction. I would ask the worker, "What work are you performing? What maybe did you talk about in your toolbox talk in the last week or if you did one in that morning?" And that would tell me, are they talking about the hazards and how are they correcting them? Is that an open conversation or is it one of those, "just

get your job done, and we don't want to talk to you and protect you.”

Those are the differences between a good IRS and just a fast-paced job that doesn't care about worker safety. I would then ask them, what training have you received? I mean, there's obvious ones about fault protection, but sometimes it's training on tools, training on how they're setting up the work, training on hazards specific to their task. Those are big ones. And then if they did have a safety concern, who would they report that to? Is there a worker health and safety rep that they know that they can go to if they don't feel comfortable talking to their supervisor? Is there a joint health and safety committee that they can bring a concern to? If it's a bigger site, over 50 workers, is there a worker-trade committee where each trade has a voice at the table? For me, prepared sites had workers who gave those consistent answers that had those really, they were clear about the direction from the site on how to keep themselves and other people safe and who they would talk to if there was a hazard.

So, they understood the hazards in practical terms, not just in paperwork language. I always think it's important that toolbox talks are varied depending on the hazards that are present. If they're talking about the same thing every day, you could really tell that the workers get kind of complacent. And so I would talk to them like, if your job task changed, what were you guys then talking about? Would that change and would the conversation with your supervisor change based on the hazards present on the daily task? So if workers were comfortable speaking openly with myself or in a group that really went a long way, I would really try and bring the worker away from their supervisor at some point during the inspection, not because for any reason other than I wanted them to feel comfortable sometimes workers don't feel comfortable speaking up in front of their supervisor because they don't want to get in trouble for raising an issue to the ministry, but most workers were pretty comfortable in a robust IRS speaking openly because that was the culture that was created by the company.

But if they didn't, and I could kind of tell, you can kind of get that, those spidey senses go on a site where the physical hazards are present, the workers are kind of cagey. So I would try and get those not alone, but just to the side, and say, I'd give them my card maybe and say, "If you have any issues that you don't think are being handled properly, we can always chat after." But that evidence of planning and communication would be present within that comfort level that the workers had.

Adam Carruthers:

I like that. The open communication, the site-specific hazards and being open with the ministry. And if they're not comfortable with the ministry, they can always reach out to folks at the IHSA, WSPS, Workplace Safety North. We're there as well as kind of an in between the employer and the Ministry of Labour if they're not comfortable going through there. And it's all about keeping people safe. So it's really important to have that communication. Now having been on so many sites, would you be able to tell me maybe some of the top five common infractions that maybe you saw during your time as an inspector?

Aris Finnsen:

Sure. Yeah. I think it really, not to put a caveat on it, but if you go to different types of construction, there is different levels of hazards. On a residential site or a renovation, it was always PPE, hard hats, safety boots. It was always kind of a struggle to get that culture on those smaller workplaces with small

business. I know that small business in Ontario makes up the majority of workplaces and there's really a lot of work to be done there. On bigger sites, housekeeping and trip hazards, fall protection always still in Ontario, we're still having these falls that are still happening, workers either not being tied off or not being tied off in a way that will actually protect them from falling. Ladders, again, very, very high on the list of number-one orders. Are they set up properly? Are they using the right ladder? Is the ladder secured? And then of course administrative compliance issues related to postings or emergency information and that type of documentation. So the killer contraventions will always be, one, trenching, sloping, and protection from workers in those excavations. But really I would say in construction, we're still on smaller workplaces, struggling with personal protective equipment. And I'm not sure if the new legislation for hard hats will help with that or not. I think there should be a bit more focus on that simple PPE to build culture.

Adam Carruthers:

I agree. Looking at simple things, it sounds silly. It sounds simple, but-

Aris Finnsen:

It does. Yeah.

Adam Carruthers:

Yeah. How to put on a hard hat properly, the importance of tying your work boots. I joke about it. I talk about it in training programs all the time. How many times are we out on sites and we see people walking around shoelaces flapping in the wind? And it's not until you start having the conversation with these supervisors in your training about what could happen where a worker could trip on their laces, fall into an excavation, into a trench and break a leg. And then you ask the question, who's going to show up? And the answer always is the Ministry of Labour. And they're going to ask questions about training. They're going to ask questions about your planning, your jobsite, all that kind of stuff. I think it's really good when you talk about your top infractions. It's really about those incidents that are either simple or it's the incidents that lead to a lot of the critical injuries, the fatalities in Ontario. So really important to make sure we get those covered off. Now you've mentioned documentation a couple of times so far. Are there any key documents that you would expect to see on the site, or are there any common gaps with the documentation that you found?

Aris Finnsen:

You have a notice of project. Having it posted is very important. As I said earlier, for the inspector to identify the key workplace parties on a notice of project is very important. But emergency contact information, is there evidence that you have a plan should something go wrong? Where is the nearest hospital? It's interesting. I once did a fatality investigation and a worker had injured themselves and I don't think they realized that the hospital was down the street, because there was no emergency information posted. And it was a very sad case where they ended up passing away and dying because they didn't know how close a hospital was. And I always wonder to myself whether that would've made a difference in the outcome of that incident.

But also joint health and safety committee meeting minutes and records. It's really important as an inspector, I would walk in and I would have a look at those to know what are the ongoing issues and how are they being corrected? And is there a pattern of the same things coming up over and over and over again?

Orientation of workers, very, very important documentation that you might not want to see, but the fact that it's done in some capacity. A lot of these things live in computers nowadays, but sometimes the workers would have orientation stickers on their hard hats, and that would tell me that the workplace took the time to talk to workers about hazards, who their supervisor was, what to do in the event of an emergency. I would ask about training records and competency. And then of course site-specific policies and procedures. Did you plan for that excavation? Did you plan for that working at heights? Did you delineate areas that other workers shouldn't go in? Is there any traffic hazards that need to be identified and planned for? Things like that. But usually the gaps would be those missing training records for always working at heights or that specific training on equipment sometimes where you would see a worker not using equipment properly, you'd ask for the training and they wouldn't have it.

That incomplete documentation. Doing a safety talk or a toolbox talk, is really good habit for workplaces to get into, but the documentation has to tell a story. It has to really tell what the workplace talked about specifically. We would find toolbox talks on working at heights or fall protection and it would be very vague as to what they talk about. But did they talk about wearing the equipment properly? Did they talk about planning for the fall hazard or following the manual for the equipment or how to install an anchor properly? And then the workers would just scribble their name. But this documentation is going to be used as good due diligence down the line or showing good documentation perhaps to help you if something bad was to happen. So if you don't know the worker's name or who is in that meeting, it's really important to make sure that the documentation is thorough so you can review it later and know that you did a good job explaining what you told to workers on paper.

I would have lots of conversations with workers, "Oh yeah, I told them last week. Oh yeah, I told them that. " And I would always ask them, "Well, where did you write that down? Did you write that down in a toolbox talk like last week? Is it in your supervisor logbook?" And to review the information that they wrote down nine times out of 10, they didn't either tell enough information in that documentation or they didn't write the worker's name down, or they didn't write where they spoke to them. And so I would always really share that that information being thorough would be important to them down the line if they needed to use that in court or to tell an inspector who's going to write a ticket. Well, no, I actually, I told them last week on lot 18 to tie-off properly. So that's kind of the gaps that I would see for documentation.

Some of the other things would be I would show up to a site and step in the site trailer and all the postings are from a different job. They had moved the site trailer, not every job was there for very long, and then they'd move it and it would be like the notice of project for the last job and the map to the hospital from a different address. And so it would be, I see that you planned your last job really well, but all of those things need to be in place from the time your job start.

And then if things were not available or they didn't know where they were, do you have a Form 1000 on paper? Great. If not, where are they located? Because the Form 1000s really help an inspector identify the correct company if they have to write orders. If you write an order to Bob's Roofing, but there's 14 Bob's Roofings in Ontario, that really helps the inspector to identify the correct employer and their

address. So that's really important. And having all of those documents organized and accessible just helps that inspection go more efficiently, helps the inspector know that there's good planning and organization around the job itself. If you know that the paperwork's in place, well, you have a good idea that the rest of the job might be going well as well.

Adam Carruthers:

I like that. And when you talk about things about documentation, the first thing I think about is due diligence. And it's building that due diligence defense of, am I taking every precaution reasonable? And that is what we look at for the employer, the constructor, the supervisor. Has every precaution been taken reasonable in the circumstance for protection of the worker? Because when you look at this stuff, if it's not available, it's not ready, it's not filled out. If it's done for the last job and they move the trailer there, well, they're not taking every precaution reasonable, because they're relying on previous information. You don't even know if that was the last job. That could have been from three jobs before from the trailer just moving and moving. So you never know what it is. And I like how you said, have the stuff available. I can tell you having done auditing, having gone out, looked at stuff, if I have to wait for stuff as an auditor, it makes you more frustrated. It makes you more annoyed, let's say. And now I just look at other things and I start seeing other things that aren't done properly while I'm waiting for this stuff to show up and I'm already annoyed.

Aris Finnsen:

And that's exactly the same for the ministry. If you're making them wait they're still looking around at your jobsite, and now they're looking at other things that they maybe would not have seen before while they're waiting for you to get organized.

Adam Carruthers:

Exactly, 100 per cent. So, that leads to a couple of different things that the ministry can do. They can lead to orders, it can lead to fines, it can lead to charges. I never hope anybody gets charged. I never hope anybody gets a fine. But personally, I never looked at orders as being a bad thing. They were something that could assist me with becoming a better safety person, help the supervisor on site be more productive. So were there any common mistakes or issues that actually led to orders, and which ones of those could have easily have been preventable?

Aris Finnsen:

Right. I think honestly, having that supervisor presence, the difference between having a supervisor who's competent present on site and not present is very, very visible in the first few minutes of an inspection or can always lead to orders, because having a competent supervisor, they've done the planning, they're looking ahead at the hazards. A good supervisor knows that the foundation's going to be poured, and then we're going to have to backfill, and then they've thought in their mind about what the hazards coming up are, and they're going to plan ahead. They're going to call the right people to make sure that things are being done in advance of when the hazards are there. So that is a very, very big one. Those supervisors, honestly in Ontario, we really need to do a push for competent supervisors,

supervisors who know the hazards, know how to correct them, and know how to talk to workers about them.

I would find issues with site setup that could have been anticipated. You know that you're having maybe lots of equipment on site, so you need to plan for workers and equipment to work next to each other. It means you need to have clear work paths of travel for workers separate from equipment. I could tell if workers were walking behind equipment all the time, they hadn't planned for that. They hadn't planned for where workers are going to go. If they're not wearing high visibility, I could tell that they hadn't anticipated that the site would be as congested. I also think that holding trades accountable, if there's no accountability system in place from the supervisor or from the constructor to trades, you can tell. You can tell that workers are not held accountable for their part. And as we talked about earlier, workers have a responsibility and duties under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) as well.

Failure to supervise and hold them accountable is a very big job, and it's not easy. And I don't envy some of these supervisors who didn't hire these workers themselves, but if they are failing to hold them accountable and implement corrective actions and hold those planning meetings, you could really tell. And that's what led to orders, preventable things that could have been planned for. It's just housekeeping. As one small example, housekeeping falls on everybody. It's a daily responsibility, or as needed, as we know in the regulation. And if you could tell that workers were not held accountable to cleaning up their work area every day and then next thing you know, there's crap lying everywhere and it really causes a lot of problems. So you could really tell that nobody's being held accountable to those things. So it really just does come to planning the internal responsibility system (IRS).

Everybody has a part to play. Everybody needs to be held accountable and planning the work as you go, knowing that next week we're going to have the roofers are coming. So have we talked about, do we know that they have training coming prior to coming to the job? Is this a company that sends their workers for *Working at Heights*? Do they plan the work? Have we created a place for them to delineate their work so nobody's working underneath them? Things like that. You could always tell that there wasn't any plan in place and then all of a sudden everybody's on top of each other was really what would happen for the most common orders.

Adam Carruthers:

Well, I like how you make it sound so simple, but we also understand that every site is different, every company is different, every trade is different. And for me, I think it starts with just understanding at least some of the basic regulations, the basic laws that apply to the work that we do. And we remind people that the act is, what am I responsible for? And that goes in. We talked about how the employer and the supervisor take every precaution reasonable. I always tell people that's the ministry's catch-all, because that book can't cover everything you do every day, every week, every month, every year. There's just too much stuff. Technology's moving too fast. And then we talk about the regulations being, how do I do what I'm supposed to do? And the construction regulations, it covers awful lot of different stuff from trenching, excavations, access, egress, elevated work platforms, working at heights, all the different stuff that we're dealing with. But there's over 800 laws in Ontario. And I always remind people that you don't need to know 800 laws in Ontario, but you should have an understanding, not word for word, but you should have an understanding of at least, what am I, as a supervisor, what am I as an employer, as a constructor, and even what am I as a worker responsible to do? Responsible to know, to

make sure that I'm going to go home safe and all of my workers are going to go home safe? And I think that's good advice that I give all supervisors. You don't need to know word for word. I don't know word for word the regulations, but at least understanding how to navigate it, how to locate something and having resources, whether it's the Ministry of Labour, whether it's IHSA, whether it's a third-party consultant, just someone that can give you good, competent advice.

Adam Carruthers:

I like that. Speaking of orders, if somebody does get an order, what's the best way for an employer or a constructor to respond to those orders?

Aris Finnson:

Except the order professionally. Just like every law can be interpreted different ways, but if you come out of the gate arguing with every order that the ministry is issuing verbally at the time of an inspection, it's not setting a good tone for the inspector. I think accepting the order professionally, being open to what they're saying, a little bit of healthy debate is okay in the right way. And now I say that every inspector is different. I don't know everything. I don't expect, as you just said, the sites to know everything, but I think accepting the order, being open to that things can be interpreted differently than maybe you originally thought. I think also correct the issue immediately, whenever possible. An inspector's always going to put a verbal order in a report later, and they have that time where they sit down at their computer and they have a little bit of discretion as to whether they're going to actually issue that order as a legal order, or they're going to maybe put it in the narrative as a discussion point.

So I would say if you have small issues that come up during an inspection, correct the issue immediately. Show the inspector that you're willing to correct it on the spot, that you care enough that you're going to maybe have a labourer walk with you. I always tell people, I'm happy if you want to have someone come along, if they can correct issues at the time, it just also we're correcting issues that workers could be exposed to while we're walking and now that issue is gone. So that's great for me, but don't argue with the orders. If you have excuses all the time during an inspection, it's not going to go well for you because now the inspector is just really getting annoyed. I don't want your excuses. If this is what's happening at the time of an inspection, what's happening when an inspector's not there?

That's what they're going to be thinking to themselves. And then being open to looking at the root cause. Maybe you got a housekeeping order. Well, is this happening every day? Is there a root cause that maybe you're not talking to your trades, maybe you're not doing an inspection and giving this as corrective action to other people on an ongoing basis. So there's usually a root cause rather than a paperwork reason. So let's look at that and take the opportunity to improve your jobsite. This is some corrective constructive feedback from the ministry, but no, as we've said before, no jobsite is perfect and we don't expect that by any stretch of the imagination. And if your jobsite is perfect, well, kudos to you, that's great. But then there's always room for improvement I do think in every aspect of construction, because in 10 minutes everything can change, as we know. The crane shows up or the dump trucks show up, and things move so fast that you have to do that planning. So when you receive orders, look at it as an opportunity for improvement and an opportunity to prevent future incidents. Maybe it's something that you didn't even think about.

It can go the other way, and it can really help companies to improve on practices. I've had people before during an inspection be like, yes, we would love to receive an order for that because that will show management that it might take a little extra money to correct that issue, but we've brought it up before and maybe they didn't understand how important it was. And now the Ministry of Labour has said it. And so it can help workplaces get things done that maybe previously there was a little bit of pushback for. And I always looked at that as a win. I've really helped this workplace to improve on something. So I think just responding professionally and being open to the discussion that most inspectors want to have a discussion with you and they're people too and nobody gets into health and safety that doesn't care about workers. So if you do receive an order, it's because the inspector really cares at the end of the day.

Adam Carruthers:

I agree. I never viewed orders as a bad thing. It was a trained set of eyes coming in, seeing that there's an opportunity for improvement and trying to fix it. And it really is trying to fix it. You don't want to be having the same order over and over again. I had an example of showing up onto a site, and the first thing I do is I look up and I see they don't have guardrails in place where they should have guardrails in place. And lo and behold, I go and I check their safety board and they had a ministry inspector there probably about a month prior. And Aris, can you guess what one of their orders was?

Aris Finnson:

It was guardrails.

Adam Carruthers:

It was guardrails. So having that conversation with their site safety person, just saying, "Hey, look, I get it. You're moving, you're changing things and all that kind of stuff, but the ministry would not be happy to come back and see the exact same thing of guardrails not in place when they just called it out."

Aris Finnson:

Oh, you're asking for a ticket at that point. Inspectors read, they're supposed to have a look at the workplace history and see what orders because you're not always going to get the same inspector every time and the inspectors will look at the order history. And if they see that you've received guardrail orders and now they show up and you have more of them, that's a fine waiting to happen. And at that point there is no excuse. You've already received a written order for this and you didn't really do any planning for future guardrail requirements. So yeah, that's probably one of those times you might receive a ticket.

Adam Carruthers:

So use the orders as an opportunity for improvement, continue to make yourself better. So now Aris, you were an inspector for a while. Now I was wondering if you're willing to share, were there any weird or funny excuses for non-compliance that just absolutely surprised you when you were on site and you saw something?

Aris Finnson:

Oh, in my almost 10 years as an inspector, there were quite a few, obviously. Some people will always have an excuse, which is funny, but the roofers always would like to say the fall protection, the ropes, the lifelines, they're more of a hazard than they are to save my life. I've been doing this for 30 years, of course. It's always the 30 years. I don't know why it's not 10 or 20. It's always 30 years. I've been doing this for 30 years and that's more of a tripping hazard than anything. Nothing has happened in 30 years. I've been doing this for so long.

At first, when we are a new inspector, it's kind of annoying, but as time went on, I would just always chuckle. So it's just so funny. It's always the same thing. It's like there's like a chat room where they all talk about they're going to say the same thing. The other one is that, oh, "that always happens when you're here," and it would always be that everything is fine until the inspector shows up. Yesterday, that wasn't a hazard and we're not having this issue. It's only because you're here at this time. And I'd always kind of joke around and be like, "Oh yeah, I'm sure it's only because I'm here today that this is an issue." One memorable example I had, I was training an industrial inspector.

They like to cross-train at the ministry. So if you happen to be on call or have to be called out to help someone, you kind of have some cross-training in different regulations. So I was with an industrial inspector and a concrete pump truck had its outriggers out, and it wasn't on any pads and the ground didn't look really great. And I was talking to the operator about it and he's like, "Oh, I know what I'm doing. Again, "I've been doing this for 30 years." And I joked, I said, "I've only been doing this for three years and I can tell you right now that it's absolutely wrong." And my colleague laughed a lot and he still tells that story, but what that operator doesn't know is I had just done an investigation into a concrete pump truck that the outrigger had sunk into the ground and a worker was really injured.

And so I had read the manual and I was very up to date on how that equipment should be set up and how those trucks work. And so you never know. Inspectors are constantly doing investigations and they become experts at certain things. They're not jack-of-all-trades experts or whatever at none, but every time you do an investigation, you learn the inside and out of that specific equipment or that work task. And so I really knew that, and that wouldn't happen with every case of course, but that poor operator, I just read the manual for a pump truck inside and out. And so I could confidently tell him that even though I was new, fairly new by his standards, I knew that what he was doing was absolutely wrong.

Adam Carruthers:

It's funny the excuses that you gave, I was never an inspector and I still heard those excuses. I've been doing this for 30 years. It's only unsafe because you are here today. I can probably agree with you. They probably have some kind of chat room somewhere they say, if someone shows up and questioned you, it's 30 years, it's 30 years, so that's what we want to say. So it's just funny that the excuse just goes across the board now. What I would ask though is if you could give one piece of advice to be inspection-ready today, what advice would you give people out there, whether they're the constructor, the employer, the supervisor, or even the worker?

Aris Finnson:

I would say don't prepare for inspections or inspectors, prepare to protect workers. If your ultimate goal is the protection of workers so that everybody goes home, the rest will all come easily to you.

Maintaining the strong planning and supervision and communication, recognizing hazards that affect workers, that is what will protect workers. All of that system, I mean, I can't say it enough. The internal responsibility system, everybody has a part to play. Protecting workers is the ultimate goal. So if you're doing all of that, you are inspection ready. If you're operating in a way every day that you're eliminating hazards and communicating with workers, then you're already ready for an inspection.

Adam Carruthers:

I like that. It goes back to the IRS, the internal responsibility system, everybody having a role, everybody having a function, working together. And that's the foundation of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, everybody coming together with a shared responsibility, a shared goal of going home safe. So really enlightening all the stuff that you've mentioned today. Now, before we wrap up, I just want to say that today we covered off a lot, from what inspectors are really looking for in those first few minutes on site to the key role supervisors and workers play the documentation that matters the most, and some of the most common mistakes that can lead to orders. And more importantly, we talked about what it really means to be prepared, not just when an inspector shows up, but every day on site. So I really want to thank Aris for joining us and sharing her experiencing insight, getting that perspective from someone who's been on the other side of the inspection process is incredibly valuable.

And I know our listeners are going to take a lot away from this conversation. So I just want to say thank you for tuning in. If you would like to get in touch with us at the *IHSA Safety Podcast* or have any topic ideas, please reach out to us at podcast@ihsa.ca. I've been your host, Adam Carruthers, and remember safety culture isn't something you have, it's something you live.

Announcer:

The *IHSA Safety Podcast*. For more episodes, tips, and all things safety, go to ihsasafetypodcast.ca. Thanks for listening.