

		West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources			
		MANUAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROCEDURES			
Section	Administration	Date	March 1, 1996	Procedure #	A-18
Subject	Guidelines for Conducting Inspections and Investigations			Page	1 of 3

Environmental programs are diversified, requiring knowledge of numerous programs and technical areas. To the neophyte, and sometimes to more experienced personnel, it is difficult to cope with the myriad of objectives, codes, regulations, forms and general guidelines of the separate operations. This is particularly a problem in smaller health departments where a professional must address his attention to all environmental health programs. There is a considerable gap between college, the Sanitarian's Training Class and suddenly finding yourself on the firing line. The experienced specialist also may find him or herself in an emergency or otherwise working in an area that is outside his or her expertise.

These guidelines are recommended to all environmental health personnel. Modifications in the individual subject procedures may be necessary to meet situations that are unique to a local health department.

A. PREPARATION

1. Administrative, technical and personal preparation in the office is a prerequisite to successful field work. Awareness of the relation of the proposed action to the health department's program plan is critical. Is this work part of your established program? If not, is a program change indicated or is there sufficient flexibility to accommodate this work?

2. Know your subject. If a relatively new effort, take the time to review the available information. If indicated, consult with your supervisor and/or district staff. Take advantage of training in less familiar subjects at every opportunity in order to broaden your capabilities. Be current in your specialty area.

3. Each inspection should be conducted with the objective of protecting the public health through identifying problems, advising on corrective action and educating the operator and employees. One must keep in mind that enforcement action may be necessary and that such is enhanced by proper preparation and proper field and office execution. If you are not well acquainted with the State Code, legislative rules, Environmental Health Procedures Manual, and guidance by the Attorney General's Office and your prosecuting attorney, make it a primary objective to familiarize yourself with the same. Each of the individual procedures presented hereafter are predicated on the basic requirements of a sound investigation or evaluation and the feasibility of taking successful legal action.

4. Determine whether the travel required on your work this day or week is properly scheduled to minimize cost and maximize utilization of your own time. Reduction in available funds from Federal, State and local sources makes good management more important than ever. Hop-skip-and-jump tactics are detrimental from both an administrative and professional viewpoint. Work should be scheduled to obtain the maximum numbers of inspections and investigations that are practical. For district and state personnel this may mean overnight lodging to avoid excessive travel time. For all parties, it is most economical to provide whatever services are needed during presence in a specific community or area.

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B. THE INSPECTION OR INVESTIGATION

1. The entrance to an inspection or investigation will set the tone for the entire operation and should not be treated lightly. Approach each activity in a thoroughly professional manner and be certain to contact someone in responsible charge. Personal judgment and past experience in the situation at hand will often dictate the manner in which the responsible person is addressed. Generally, it is far better to be business-like, present your identification card and state the purpose of your visit.

2. It is preferable to have the owner or person in responsible charge accompany the inspector or investigator. However, do not be insistent upon this as he may choose to designate someone to accompany you. As you make significant findings, bring them to his attention. If it is something that can be corrected on the spot, that is the time to present it. Utilize the time in the establishment judiciously. Remain business-like and complete your job in the minimum amount of time. Do not stop to discuss the baseball game or chat over personal problems. By all means, do not accept food, drink, or other gratuities which can only engender the feeling of obligation.

3. It is very important to complete to the maximum the findings at the time of the visit. In an inspection, the standard form enables you to do this. In an investigation, a checklist must be prepared ahead of the time. It is very time consuming and sometimes fatal to return to your office and find that information you needed had not been obtained. Careful attention to the specific procedure prepared for this type of investigation or inspection will help allay this problem.

4. When leaving an establishment, it is essential that deficiencies found in an inspection be discussed with the individual in charge. The posting of an inspection form does not necessarily relieve the inspector of this responsibility. At this time you can respond to any questions that the person in charge may have. In investigations a final conference is critical, as it not only provides an opportunity to brief the person in charge on your general findings, but also to elicit more information. Above all, you will depart the establishment leaving a better impression than you would have if you had come in and darted right out.

C. RECORDS

The prompt recording of the findings in investigations and inspections is essential to good record keeping and developing a proper legal base. Be sure to identify the persons contacted. Do not delay. Either make the entries in the proper ledger, or have them made. Promptly preparing a rough draft of an investigation report will not only assure greater accuracy, but will quickly reveal what further information is needed.

D. FOLLOW UP

The type and degree of any follow up to inspections and investigations are quite variable depending upon the nature of the operation and the findings. It is germane that one of the greatest weaknesses in most environmental health programs is the failure to adequately follow up on field work. Then, except for a limited historical record, the day's work has been lost. The essentials to a good follow up can be listed as:

1. Recording inspections in the department's ledger and providing copies with any necessary cover letters to those individuals indicated in the specific procedure.
2. On an investigation, submitting a detailed report with conclusions and recommendations to your immediate superior with any indicated coordination within the staff, other departments or other agencies.
3. Consultation with the prosecuting attorney or the attorney general if indicated.
4. Preparing letters for signature by responsible individuals as mandated by your own department's correspondence procedures.
5. Carrying out necessary follow up with the responsible persons until the corrective actions are taken.
6. Taking legal action if needed.

References

History

Replaces A-18 dated November 17, 1982

Attachments