

Work Health and Safety Inspector interview questions

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What to expect

Work Health and Safety Inspector interviews typically assess your ability to apply legislation, conduct inspections, and communicate with a range of stakeholders. You can expect a mix of technical, behavioural and scenario-based questions, often delivered by a panel.

- **Technical and legislative knowledge:** Questions about the WHS Act, notices, and enforcement powers.
- **Behavioural:** Past experiences dealing with non-compliant employers or difficult situations.
- **Scenario-based:** How you would respond to a specific workplace hazard or incident.
- **Process and procedural:** How you conduct an inspection or investigation.
- **Communication and client-facing:** How you advise and educate employers and workers.

The interview usually starts with introductions and an overview of the role. Then you will be asked a series of questions, often with a panel of two or three people. There may be a written or practical exercise beforehand, such as drafting a notice or analysing a case study. The interview concludes with an opportunity for you to ask questions.

1. What powers does a WHS inspector have when they find a serious risk to health and safety?

Why they ask

Tests knowledge of statutory powers and enforcement tools.

How to structure your answer

Define the risk, outline the relevant section of the WHS Act, then explain the range of notices and actions available, such as improvement, prohibition or infringement notices. Finish with how you would prioritise immediate safety.

Example answer

"If I identify a serious risk, my first priority is to ensure the safety of workers. Under the WHS Act, I have the power to issue a prohibition notice to stop the activity immediately if there is an imminent risk. I would also consider an improvement notice to require the employer to rectify the issue within a set timeframe. If the breach is severe, I might issue an infringement notice or recommend prosecution. I would document everything carefully and follow up to confirm compliance."

2. Tell me about a time you had to deal with a hostile or uncooperative employer during an inspection.

Why they ask

Assesses resilience, communication and conflict resolution.

How to structure your answer

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

Example answer

"At a construction site, the site manager became aggressive when I pointed out a lack of fall protection. I remained calm, explained my role and the legal obligations, and focused on the safety of the workers. I gave him a chance to explain his perspective, then worked with him to identify practical solutions. By the end of the inspection, he agreed to install guardrails and we scheduled a follow-up. The result was a safer site and a more cooperative relationship."

3. You are inspecting a warehouse and notice a forklift being operated in a pedestrian area without separation. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and application of risk controls.

How to structure your answer

Assess the immediate risk, decide on action, then follow up. Use a step-by-step approach: stop the activity if necessary, gather information, then determine the appropriate enforcement response.

Example answer

"I would immediately speak to the supervisor to stop the forklift and ensure pedestrians are clear. I would then assess the risk: is there a traffic management plan, are there barriers, is the operator licensed? I would issue an improvement notice requiring a traffic management plan and physical separation, and possibly a prohibition notice if the risk is imminent. I would document the findings and schedule a follow-up inspection to confirm compliance."

4. How do you prepare an evidence brief for a prosecution?

Why they ask

Assesses attention to detail and understanding of legal processes.

How to structure your answer

Walk through the process: gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses, collecting documents, and ensuring chain of custody. Then explain how you would present it.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the inspection notes and any immediate evidence. I interview witnesses, including workers and supervisors, and collect relevant documents like training records and maintenance logs. I ensure all evidence is properly recorded and stored according to chain of custody. I then work with legal counsel to prepare a brief that sets out the facts, the breaches, and the evidence. I make sure everything is clear, concise and admissible."

5. How would you explain a complex WHS regulation to an employer who is not familiar with the law?

Why they ask

Tests ability to educate and advise without jargon.

How to structure your answer

Use plain language, relate it to their specific workplace, and check for understanding. Then offer practical steps.

Example answer

"I would start by asking what they already know about the regulation. Then I would explain the key points in simple terms, using examples from their own workplace. For instance, if it's about hazard reporting, I would say: 'You need a simple way for workers to report hazards, and you need to act on those reports.' I would give them a fact sheet and offer to follow up. I would check that they understand by asking them to explain it back to me."

6. Describe a time you had to make a difficult decision that was unpopular with your team or stakeholders.

Why they ask

Assesses integrity and ability to stand by regulatory decisions.

How to structure your answer

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

Example answer

"I once decided to issue a prohibition notice at a worksite that was under pressure to meet a deadline. The employer and even some of my colleagues thought it was too harsh. I explained that the risk of serious injury was too high and that safety could not be compromised. I stood by my decision, and the notice was upheld. The employer later thanked me because it prevented a potential tragedy. This reinforced for me the importance of impartial enforcement."