

How to Conduct Effective Bucket Foreign Object Audits

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE:

Foreign object audits are sometimes referred to as a bag or bucket audits or walks. This guide is intended to give you an overview of how to effectively implement and conduct this foreign object audit. For ease, we have used the terminology “bucket walks” throughout this document.

The bucket walk is a useful visual tool to highlight areas for improvement for foreign body control or as part of a customer complaint investigation. The bucket walk shall include all areas of the factory including storage facilities and personnel facilities. The bucket walk should be conducted by various cross functions within the business, including production, maintenance/ engineering, QA.

Findings are recorded so that corrective actions and trend analysis can be undertaken. Foreign object findings should be displayed for factory staff to see. A staff briefing can also be conducted to share the bucket walk findings with the team responsible for the area.

The bucket walk is intended to be free ranging and includes removing and collecting an item e.g. a piece of wood or plastic, taking a photograph of flaking paint or recording what has been seen during a check. Look all around you including up and down, under and on top of equipment.

FREQUENCY:

The frequency shall be based on assessment of risk, but shall ensure there are a very limited number of foreign objects found in the facility. If numbers are high, then this is an indication that frequency is inadequate, as well as increasing the risk to product safety.

Typically it would be expected that the frequency be high (once or twice per day) and with demonstrated improvements, the frequency can gradually be reduced.

RESPONSIBILITY:

Responsibility for conducting bucket walks should be spread amongst the key functions within the facility. Foreign object control is everyone’s responsibility and therefore all functions should be actively involved in the bucket walks as well as root cause analysis to determine the source of the foreign object, and thereby drive improvement to prevent recurrence.

Maintenance, production, cleaning, QA staff, and office staff can all be involved with bucket walks on a rotating roster.

PROCEDURE EXPECTATIONS:

Walk through the following areas of the facility (and any others not mentioned), looking for any loose foreign objects that are not permitted to be in that area or on/ attached to equipment. Pick up any such items and keep them in a bag/ bucket during the walk.

Foreign Body Controls

Look in each area visited for potential foreign body hazards such as glass, hard plastic, wood, metal, paper, string, tape, maintenance debris, pens, paperclips, personal effects, staples, packaging etc.

Check that only company issued knives, blades and scissors are in use with no blade sharpening in production areas.

Ask to see pre-operational line start up checks and see if your observations match those of the person signing off the line.

Damaged equipment and trays are not in use and food containers such as trays are not being used for storage of other items.

Check that labels, signs and notices are clean and in-tact and do not pose a foreign body risk.

Wooden pallets are not in use in open product areas.

Cardboard boxes and plastic bags are being opened without ripping or tearing. There is no evidence of any torn plastic, paper or cardboard.

Sieves and filters are checked to ensure they are clean and in-tact.

Storage, Despatch and Transport Areas

All storage areas are clean and free from foreign matter such as plastic, pallet wood (splinters), old equipment, other product that should not be present.

Raw materials and packaging are not stored on the floor or against the walls. All items are covered and closed.

External doors are kept closed when not in use and are closed to all sides so as to be proofed against pests.

Factory Fabrication

Fabrication joints are sealed and free from mould and do not pose a foreign body risk e.g. from deterioration of joint sealant.

Signage displayed & maintained in a manner that doesn't pose a foreign object risk.

Floors, coving and drains – all are undamaged and in good repair. No areas are lifting or breaking up.

Walkways and steps over production lines are fitted with back plates and enclosed sides to prevent product contamination.

Ceilings and overheads are clean and do not pose a foreign body hazard.

Lighting in all areas is protected against breakage – protective covers are not broken. This also includes emergency exit signs, pest control (FICU) units

Internal Factory Offices

Offices in production and storage areas shall be managed to ensure they are not a source of foreign material eg staplers, paper clips, jewelry, hole punches, wood, fabric etc. They shall be considered as part of the production area.

Eating and drinking is not allowed in internal factory offices.

Equipment

Equipment is maintained in a good condition with no foreign body risks eg fraying belts, brushes with bristle loss. Consider areas where foreign objects or debris could accumulate.

Check whether any tools or spare parts have been left on equipment.

Cleaning shall be carried out post-maintenance to ensure there is no risk to product. A production representative will inspect and accept the cleaned equipment back from the engineering work, ensuring no tools, parts, lubricants remain and the cleaning has been suitably cleaned. This applies to any maintenance work. That is, whether it is planned/ preventive or emergency maintenance.

Factory Hygiene

Cleaning equipment is well maintained with no damaged handles, bristles etc.

Only authorized cleaning utensils / equipment are being used, and are stored correctly.

Waste

Waste containers are clean and not overflowing, and do not provide a risk to the product.

Pest Control

There is no evidence of pest in the facility, including actual pest sightings and droppings, or pest tracks. There shall be no overflowing EFK units.

Monitoring & Corrective Action:

Upon completion of the bucket walk dispense all objects found onto a table with key staff involved in bucket walks. All the objects found must be documented. It's a good idea to take photos of the objects for future training, and to build a library of objects found in your facility.

For each item found, walk through a root cause analysis method (eg. the 5 Whys, or Ishikawa tools can be used to aid this process) to determine the source of the foreign object. Actions and responsibility shall then be discussed, determined and documented to ensure effective action is taken to prevent the foreign object from being found again.

If an object continues to be found the root cause and actions taken require further scrutiny to prevent ongoing recurrence.

Trending of bucket walk performance shall be regularly discussed in Quality Huddles with key and senior management (such as weekly) to ensure ongoing improvement. The sharing of this trending with factory floor/ packing room staff will help raise their awareness regarding foreign object control. Targets to help ensure ongoing reduction and improvement in bucket walks will also help drive improvement. Incentive awards, such as monthly, for staff identifying foreign object concerns are a great way to heighten awareness and reward those showing diligence.