

§ 95-136. Inspections.

(a) In order to carry out the purposes of this Article, the Commissioner or Director, or their duly authorized agents, upon presenting appropriate credentials to the owner, operator, or agent in charge, are authorized:

- (1) To enter without delay, and at any reasonable time, any factory, plant, establishment, construction site, or other area, work place or environment where work is being performed by an employee of an employer; and
- (2) To inspect and investigate during regular working hours, and at other reasonable times, and within reasonable limits, and in a reasonable manner, any such place of employment and all pertinent conditions, processes, structures, machines, apparatus, devices, equipment, and materials therein, and to question privately any such employer, owner, operator, agent or employee.
- (3) The Commissioner or Director, or their duly authorized agents, shall reinspect any place of employment where a willful serious violation was found to exist during the previous inspection and a final Order has been entered.

(b) In making his inspections and investigations under this Article, the Commissioner may issue subpoenas to require the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of evidence under oath. Witnesses shall be reimbursed for all travel and other necessary expenses which shall be claimed and paid in accordance with the prevailing travel regulations of the State. In case of a failure or refusal of any person to obey a subpoena under this section, the district judge or superior court judge of the county in which the inspection or investigation is conducted shall have jurisdiction upon the application of the Commissioner to issue an order requiring such person to appear and testify or produce evidence as the case may require, and any failure to obey such order of the court may be punished by such court as contempt thereof.

(c) Subject to regulations issued by the Commissioner a representative of the employer and an employee authorized by the employees shall be given an opportunity to consult with or to accompany the Commissioner, Director, or their authorized agents, during the physical inspection of any work place described under subsection (a) for the purpose of aiding such inspection. Where there is no authorized employee representative, the Commissioner, Director, or their authorized agents, shall consult with a reasonable number of employees concerning matters of health and safety in the work place.

- (d) (1) Any employees or an employee representative of the employees who believe that a violation of a safety or health standard exists that threatens physical harm, or that an imminent danger exists, may request an inspection by giving notice of such violation or danger to the Commissioner or Director. Any such notice shall be reduced to writing, shall set forth with reasonable particularity the grounds for the notice, and shall be signed by employees or the employee representatives of the employees, and a copy shall be provided the employer or his agent no later than at the time of inspection. Upon the request of the person giving such notice, his name and the names of individual employees referred to therein shall not appear in such copy of any record published, released or made available pursuant to subsection (e) of this section. If upon receipt of such notification the Commissioner or Director determines there are reasonable grounds to believe that such violation or danger exists, the Commissioner or Director or their authorized agents shall promptly make a special investigation in accordance with the provisions of this section as soon as practicable to determine if such

violation or danger exists. If the Commissioner or Director determines there are not reasonable grounds to believe that a violation or danger exists he shall notify the employees or representatives of the employees, in writing, of such determination.

- (2) Prior to, during and after any inspection of a work place, any employees or representative of employees employed in such work place may notify the inspecting Commissioner, Director, or their agents, in writing, of any violation of this Article which they have reason to believe exists in such work place. The Commissioner shall, by regulation, establish procedures for informal review of any refusal by a representative of the Commissioner or Director to issue a citation with respect to any such alleged violation and shall furnish the employees or representatives of employees requesting such review a written statement of the reason for the Commissioner's or Director's final disposition of the case.

(e) The Commissioner is authorized to compile, analyze, and publish, in summary or detailed form, all reports or information obtained under this section. Files and other records relating to investigations and enforcement proceedings pursuant to this Article shall not be subject to inspection and examination as authorized by G.S. 132-6 while such investigations and proceedings are pending, except that, subject to the provisions of subsection (e1) of this section, an employer cited under the provisions of this Article is entitled to receive a copy of the official inspection report which is the basis for citations received by the employer following the issuance of citations.

(e1) Upon the written request of and at the expense of the requesting party, official inspection reports of inspections conducted pursuant to this Article shall be available for release in accordance with the provisions contained in this subsection and subsection (e) of this section. The names of witnesses or complainants, and any information within statements taken from witnesses or complainants during the course of inspections or investigations conducted pursuant to this Article that would name or otherwise identify the witnesses or complainants, shall not be released to any employer or third party and shall be redacted from any copy of the official inspection report provided to the employer or third party. Witness statements that are in the handwriting of the witness or complainant shall, upon the request of and at the expense of the requesting party, be transcribed so that information that would not name or otherwise identify the witness may be released. A witness or complainant may, however, sign a written release permitting the Commissioner to provide information specified in the release to any persons or entities designated in the release. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the use of the name or statement of a witness or complainant by the Commissioner in enforcement proceedings or hearings held pursuant to this Article. The Commissioner shall make available to the employer 10 days prior to a scheduled enforcement hearing unredacted copies of: (i) the witness statements the Commissioner intends to use at the enforcement hearing, (ii) the statements of witnesses the Commissioner intends to call to testify, or (iii) the statements of witnesses whom the Commissioner does not intend to use that might support an employer's affirmative defense or otherwise exonerate the employer; provided a written request for the statement or statements is received by the Commissioner no later than 12 days prior to the enforcement hearing. If the request for an unredacted copy of the witness statement or statements is received less than 12 days before a hearing, the statement or statements shall be made available as soon as practicable. The Commissioner may permit the use of names and statements of witnesses and complainants and information obtained during the course of inspections or investigations conducted pursuant to this Article by public officials in the performance of their public duties.

- (f) (1) Inspections conducted under this section shall be accomplished without advance notice, subject to the exception in subdivision (2) below this subsection.
- (2) The Commissioner or Director may authorize the giving to any employer or employee advance notice of an inspection only when the giving of such notice is essential to the effectiveness of such inspection, and in keeping with regulations issued by the Commissioner.
- (g) The Commissioner shall prescribe such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary to carry out his responsibilities under this Article, including rules and regulations dealing with the inspection of an employer's establishment. (1973, c. 295, s. 11; 1993, c. 317, ss. 1, 2; 1999-364, ss. 1, 2; 2003-174, s. 1.)