Behavioral Science Activity Guide

* (2-3 min) To start, let’s spend at least 1 minute alone coming up with the behaviors, actions, and thoughts a code inspector might have in a given inspection.
  + (There should be lots of overlap, but maybe have each person just share one yet unmentioned thing they wrote down.)
* (2-3 min) Why do you think there was an initial increase in health and safety violations?
  + Possible answers: more salient; social pressure; increase in motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic); checklist was a good nudge.
* (5-10 min) Talking with staff and looking at additional data would be critical to confirm hypotheses, but what behavioral barriers—cognitive, psychological, environmental, social—are likely keeping the health and safety violation numbers low? Start by trying to list as many ideas as you can think of for at least 1 minute alone (add time as needed, more than 1 min is likely).
  + Possible answers: inspectors actually believe they are focusing on health and safety—poor memory, confirmation bias, recency bias; habit overpowers intention—like diets, we truly want to do better, but it is hard to create a new pattern; a lot of things are happening when inspecting a home—even with a checklist, it can be hard to remember; a code inspector can be alone for prolonged period—performance is likely to dip, especially around new items; there may be no intrinsic motivation to cite these violations—inspectors have lots of experience and likely have firm beliefs about what is efficient and effective.
  + (If they are struggling, perhaps ask how the situation is similar to diets, or look at their notes on doing an inspection.)
* (5-10 min) What are some nudges you could put into place to overcome many of the most promising behavioral behaviors? What could be both feasible and effective? Again, start by listing as many ideas as you can think of for at least 1 minute alone (add time as needed).
  + Possible ideas: share peer comparison data with inspectors at regular intervals; provide feedback to inspectors on their prior performance; share info with inspectors on successful outcomes from health/safety violations; electronically nudge (SMS/email) inspectors once a week/day at time specified by inspector; focus on one health and safety violation per week/month; have inspectors anonymously evaluate another inspection report; create a checklist for a whole inspection; create clear visual cue on form or materials that remind inspectors of health and safety checklist; have inspectors create weekly goals about health and safety violations (untied from formal performance evaluations) they get feedback on.
* (The suggestions might be more detailed than my possible list of ideas—that is great! If you have extra time, try to come up with a final list of interventions—2 interventions max.)

Background Info for Facilitator (from Adria)

* We identified a couple problems when we were trying to improve code enforcement.
  + Inspectors were only looking for the items that were complained about.  So if someone complained about a broken window – the inspector would go look at that and cite it.  However they often wouldn’t cite the outlet that was exposed, but not complained about.
  + Additionally, often times there are multiple options for citations for the same problem.  For example – for a missing railing some inspectors would issue violation A and other inspectors would issue violation B…even though it was for the same issue.  This was problematic for a few reasons – first some violation codes carried more weight than others.  Secondly – it was bad from a data perspective.  We weren’t able to see which issues were most prevalent or if there were any trends.
* As a solution, went through an exercise of identifying the biggest health and safety issues for houses.
  + We pulled a list from the Green and Healthy Home Initiative and also asked the Director of Code Enforcement and Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business Development to identify their top health and safety priorities.
* Then we took that list and identified any potential NYS codes that related to those items.
* Finally the Director of Code Enforcement determined which of the code options he would prefer to use to cite the issue.
* Once we had our list of issues and corresponding codes developed, we created a handout with the information.  The handout was structured like a check-list.  We laminated them, and provided one to each code inspector (along with a dry erase marker).
* We asked that when code inspectors went into homes they look for all of the health and safety issues on the laminated sheet even if they weren’t complained about.  (in addition to what was complained about).  (For some reason I can’t directly link to this document right now…but it’s the “copy of check-list” word file in the google folder.)
* This had a great impact at first:  46% more health and safety violations were identified in the first two months….but then it dropped off.  And now, I only think 1-ish person is using this tool