

Developing an employee safety committee

by Dan R. Stockwell

Before you begin,

Have the following materials available for discussion:

- An example of your safety committee agenda sheet;
- An example of your safety committee inspections/projects action register.



Organizations sometimes have committees, which seem to function without purpose or direction. A safety committee with a purpose and objectives can be an important element in an organization's health and safety process. However, for this goal to be accomplished, employees need to be involved, and management can assist with this process.

In forming a committee, management can provide direction by:

- Establishing a budget;
- Suggesting the frequency of meetings;
- Establishing the committee function within the organization.

In developing a committee, it is important to have representatives from both the hourly and salaried ranks. Depending on an organization's structure, generally it is good to have representation from each department, since the committee's decisions may affect the entire organization. Committee members may either be volunteers or persons selected by their departments.

A safety committee should develop a mission statement, which outlines:

- The committee's purpose;
- Member roles and expectations;
- How the committee will be structured;
- The committee's responsibilities to the organization.

This should be one of the first action items the committee completes.

A committee's basic structure should include a chairperson to coordinate and direct the committee, and a secretary to assist with meeting minutes and other communications, such as following up on projects or assignments. Some organizations have assistant chairpersons to help the committee. This structure serves as a training process and assists with development of committee members.

Depending on the structure of an organization, basic committee functions may include:

- Developing a yearly health and safety plan of action, including goals and devising a process to track the elements in the plan;
- Conducting periodic health and safety inspections to identify and correct physical conditions, as well as unsafe work practices and procedures;
- Reviewing or investigating accidents, injuries and near misses, as well as recommending corrective actions;
- Coordinating and/or conducting health and safety training;
- Developing health and safety procedures and policies;
- Providing representation from various departments concerning health and safety issues.

The committee should meet on a periodic basis to follow-up on the action items established by the committee. This follow-up and the completion of action items can provide committee members with the encouragement to further participate in the health and safety process.

Summary

Employee involvement through a safety committee can facilitate cooperation and communication in an organization. However, a safety committee cannot take the place of individual responsibility and accountability for health and safety. It also is no substitute for an active and committed management effort toward occupational safety and health. A safety committee is just part of the health and safety process.

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We always strive to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to Safety@ohiobwc.com.

References

Web sites

- Guide to Effective Joint/Labor Management Safety & Health Committees (New Jersey Dept. of Health and Senior Services): www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/jlmhsc.pdf
- Workplace Safety Committees and Meetings (Oregon OSHA): www.orosha.org/pdf/workshops/101w.pdf

Publications

- *Leader's guide to safety committees*. J.J. Keller & Associates, 1997
- Lingafelter, Jennifer. "Building an effective safety team." *Workers' Comp Quarterly*, Summer 2005, p22-25

Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene's video library has videos on safety committees. These are available for loan to Ohio employers. Order a catalog by calling **1-800-OHIOBWC** (ask for the video library), or visit our Web site, ohiobwc.com.