

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY COMMITTEE

I. PURPOSE OF THE SAFETY COMMITTEE

1. To increase and maintain employee interest in health and safety issues.
2. To convince managers, supervisors, and employees, through awareness and training activities, that **they are primarily responsible** for incident prevention in the workplace.
3. To help make health and safety activities an integral part of the organization's operating procedures, culture, and programs.
4. To provide an opportunity for the free discussion of health and safety problems and corrective actions.
5. To inform and educate employees and supervisors about health and safety issues, new standards, research findings, specific safety concerns, etc.
6. To help reduce the risk of workplace injuries and illnesses.
7. To help ensure compliance with federal and state health and safety standards.

II. SAFETY COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION

The Safety Committee should include a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, a Secretary, and General Members.

A. CHAIRPERSON

The primary duties of the Chairperson are to:

1. Develop Safety Committee meeting agendas.
2. Coordinate and conduct orderly Safety Committee meetings.
3. Establish necessary deadlines and sub-committee assignments.



4. Provide appropriate and timely follow-up on problems and recommendations developed by the Safety Committee.
5. Serve as a communication liaison between management and the Safety Committee.
6. Promote health and safety by personal example.

An effective Chairperson:

1. Must have the confidence of other Safety Committee members, employees, and management.
2. Be familiar with the general principles and concepts of health and safety management and applicable VOSHA/OSHA standards.
3. Be visibly enthusiastic about his/her organization's Health and Safety Program.

Note: The chairperson may be appointed by management or (preferably) elected by majority vote of the Safety Committee members.

B. VICE-CHAIRPERSON

The primary duty of the Vice Chairperson is to assume leadership of the Safety Committee when the chairperson is unavailable on a short-term basis, or for some reason, resigns from the Committee. The Vice-Chairperson should also serve on one or more subcommittees or task forces, and take an active role in other committee activities.

The benefits of establishing the Vice-Chairperson position include:

1. The ability to conduct business and hold meetings as usual in the absence of the Chairperson.
2. Continuity of Committee leadership and activities should the Chairperson leave the position for example by resignation or a scheduled rotation of leadership.
3. Assistance with the coordination and direction of the Safety Committee and sub-committee activities.

C. SECRETARY

The primary duties of the Secretary are:

1. To maintain, record and disseminate minutes of each Safety Committee meeting.
2. To actively promote health and safety by his/her personal example and communication with employees and supervisors.

Notes:

1. *The Secretary should be appointed by the Chairperson or elected by members of the Safety Committee for a one-year term. Rotating this post periodically to give all members an opportunity to serve as Secretary is recommended.*
2. *In smaller organizations, the Secretary duties and the Vice-Chairperson duties can be combined.*

D. GENERAL MEMBERS

The third, and most important, element of a Safety Committee is the general membership. Each Safety Committee should be made up of individuals from various areas and levels of organization representing administration, operating departments, and staff personnel. Union participation on the Safety Committee should be in accordance with state/local labor agreements. Position descriptions for general members should be written to clarify individual roles and responsibilities.

III. SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBER ELIGIBILITY & TERMS OF SERVICE

To help ensure that the Safety Committee remains an enthusiastic and generally experienced group of individuals (while at the same time encouraging organization-wide participation and representation), membership eligibility requirements and terms of service must clearly be defined.

1. Criteria should be developed that will formally define the membership selection process, qualification requirements, length of individual membership terms, and rotation of membership procedures. These criteria should cover all membership positions/functions, including the Chairperson, Vice- Chairperson, Secretary, and the general membership. It is important that the adopted criteria for membership selection be consistent with applicable state and local union contractual language.
2. General membership on the Safety Committee should be established on a rotation basis. For example, with three-year terms, 1/3 of the general membership would change every year. With two-year terms, 1/2 the membership would change. However, careful consideration should be given to not reducing the number of experienced and knowledgeable members by having too large a percentage of the general members changing on too frequent a basis.

IV. DUTIES OF A SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBER

1. Regularly attend all meetings and actively participate in discussion and Safety Committee activities.
2. Report all unsafe conditions and unsafe acts as they become aware.

3. Report all injuries and near misses involving yourself, or other employees in your respective department.
4. Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvement of health and safety.
5. Encourage safety-related input from employees.
6. Follow all applicable safety procedures and rules.
7. Influence others to work safely.
8. Conduct safety inspections.
9. Wear required personal protective equipment.
10. Investigate incidents when requested.
11. Share information/suggestions with other employees.

V. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SAFETY COMMITTEE

1. Develop a written mission statement and charter.
2. Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of officers and general members.
3. Identify and prioritize goals and establish action plans to achieve each goal.
4. Select members (include representation from different levels and all areas of the organization).
5. Meet at least quarterly (4 times/year).
6. Record and disseminate the minutes of each meeting, documenting attendance, problems and issues and corrective action proposed and actions taken to address each issue.
7. Make meeting attendance mandatory with the penalty of removal for repeated absences (send a representative from your department in your place if you cannot attend).
8. Develop methods to increase and maintain safety awareness.
9. Organize special sub-committees to address specific issues and projects.

10. Communicate the purpose, activities, and accomplishments of the committee to all employees.
11. Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvement of health and safety.
12. Encourage safety-related input from employees.
13. Follow all applicable safety procedures and rules.
14. Influence others to work safely.
15. Conduct safety inspections.
16. Wear required personal protective equipment.
17. Investigate incidents when requested.
18. Share information/suggestions with other employees.

VI. FUNCTIONS OF THE SAFETY COMMITTEE

1. Conduct periodic reviews of the Agency's/Institution's written Health and Safety Program and Action Plan(s) in order to monitor progress and to make recommendations and revisions as necessary.
2. Periodically conduct safety inspections of individual departments to:
 - a. Identify hazards and unsafe acts for correction. Conduct Job Hazard Analyses (JHA's).
 - b. Assign corrective responsibility.
 - c. Evaluate program effectiveness.
 - d. Report to management on identified problems and on workplace health and safety improvements.
3. Review accident reports for trends and problem areas.
4. Review and recommend training and educational safety programs for all employees.
5. Involve other employees/departments in various projects and functions to reaffirm everyone's responsibility for health and safety.
6. Ensure the organization's compliance with all established health and safety guidelines, policies and with applicable VOSHA/OSHA standards and regulations.
7. Identify high-risk job tasks and develop written safe operating procedures.

Note: Health and Safety Committees should function only within the scope of the authority and responsibility granted by their respective Agency/Institution and labor agreement(s).

VII. OTHER SAFETY COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The Safety Committee may also wish to further promote health and safety awareness through the following example activities/programs:

1. Safety Contests (for example: best safety slogan of the month).
2. Poster programs/contests.
3. Audio-visual presentations.
4. Special safety/health events such as a "Safety Rodeo.
5. Bring in guest speakers/conduct seminars/special training programs.

6. Employee suggestion programs.
7. Injury prevention campaigns (back injury prevention, slip/trip/fall prevention, staff/student interaction claims, etc).
8. Special safety recognition awards.
9. Review and recommend training and educational safety programs for all employees.
10. Review accident reports for trends and problem areas.
11. Involve other employees/departments in various projects and functions to reaffirm everyone's responsibility for health and safety.
12. Ensure the organization's compliance with all established health and safety guidelines, policies and with applicable Department of Commerce/OSHA standards and regulations.
13. Identify high-risk job tasks and develop written safe operating procedures.
14. Newsletters/promotional material.
15. Health/wellness fairs and activities.
16. Serve as a communication liaison between management and the Safety Committee.
17. Promote health and safety by personal example.
18. Discuss wellness initiatives at every meeting.
19. Co-meet with Wellness Team at least once per year.

Note: Health and Safety Committees should function only within the scope of the authority and responsibility granted by their respective Agency/Institution and labor agreement(s).

VIII. CONDUCTING SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Safety Committee meetings should be held regularly on a specific day and time and at least on a quarterly basis (i.e. the first Thursday of each month/quarter at 3:30 pm). When a Safety Committee meeting schedule is planned well in advance, the members are then in a better position to arrange for their attendance and prepare for discussion.

A typical Safety Committee meeting should include:

1. Review of unfinished items from the previous Safety Committee meeting(s) and/or activities.
2. Status reports from any sub-committees.
3. Discussion/review of safety inspection reports and the actions taken to correct observed hazards.
4. Review of accident/incidents sustained since the previous meeting and a discussion of measures to prevent similar accidents and incidents.
5. Review of the status of current action plans or training programs.
6. Review of outstanding recommendations developed by risk management consultants and/or VOSHA/OSHA safety compliance inspectors.
7. Discussion about activities related to future action plans and/or training programs.
8. Discussion about special activities such as health fairs.
9. Discussion of new business, future agenda items, projects, and meeting dates.

The initial Safety Committee Meeting should cover the following items:

1. Welcome members to the Safety Committee.
2. Set a schedule for the Safety Committee to meet (for instance, the first Tuesday of every month at 2:00 p.m.) that is as convenient as possible for all members.
3. Determine who will be the Safety Committee officers - Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary (you may wish to have temporary officers until the Safety Committee has met at least a couple of times).
4. Discuss the duties of the Safety Committee and determine which duties should initially receive the highest priority. Some examples would include conducting facility self-inspections, developing required written safety programs, and conducting incident/accident review.

5. Determine the need for sub-committees to take responsibility for some of the priority items. If sub-committees are formed, their work on projects can be advanced by meeting between the full Safety Committee meetings. They can then report on their progress at the next meeting of the larger group. This should also facilitate keeping the length of the full Safety Committee meetings to an hour or less.

IX. SUMMARY

Much of the potential value of a Safety Committee can be lost without careful development of the purpose, functions, and activities of the Safety Committee. The Safety Committee will function effectively only after the need for it is recognized and employees, supervisors and managers welcome its services. At their worst, Safety Committees can be a “negative-minded” group confining their approach primarily to (after-the-fact) placing of blame. However, at their best, they can become an effective tool to help prevent unsafe practices and conditions, reduce the risk of injury and illnesses and to help motivate employees and supervisors to become actively involved in an agency's or institution's health and safety program.

XI. TOP MANAGEMENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SAFETY COMMITTEE

Show employees that your commitment to safety is a serious one. If you chose to be a member of the Safety Committee, then you should remember to encourage all members' involvement in the discussion of safety issues and concerns. Should you elect not to become a member of the Safety Committee, and then you should attend the initial meeting and visit periodically after that. You should also review the meeting minutes and make yourself available to respond to questions and concerns from the Safety Committee. Most importantly, management must establish the authority of the Safety Committee and then support it.

XII. ESSENTIALS OF AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY COMMITTEE

1. Top management officials should attend Safety Committee meetings (at least periodically). They must show interest in the safety program to both supervisory management and labor.
2. Develop a Mission Statement: A clear statement that supports the Safety Committee and states what management is looking for and what it is expecting to get from the Safety Committee. A Mission Statement gives the Safety Committee guidelines to meet the requirements of upper management.
3. Implement improved, cooperative inspections that include workers and management. Make inspections fun and gratifying by noting not just the negative but the positive conditions in the workplace. Issue rewards after inspections.
4. The Safety Committee Chairperson must show strong leadership and keep things moving.
5. The Safety Committee should address legitimate safety issues only. The Safety Committee should not become a format for negotiating union business or airing grievances.
6. Meeting agendas must be established and provided to members in advance. The agenda should establish a starting and ending time for the Safety Committee meeting.

