

“You Need a Safety Committee”
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Getting employees involved in their own safety is essential in establishing a safety program. One way to do this is to have a safety committee.

This is an opportunity for employees to speak up and not only make management aware of safety issues, but more importantly this is an opportunity to help develop and implement a plan to address those issues. Having a safety committee gives employees a voice and empowers them to make changes. The company also benefits greatly from having an effective safety committee. The committee is a valuable part of your safety program and can help protect your business from avoidable costs that directly affect your bottom line. An effective and empowered committee can help save time and money by improving everyday work activities while reducing the risk of employee injury.

The basic function of a safety committee is to encourage and maintain a safe work environment. A safety committee should give employees a sense of ownership by giving them an opportunity to directly improve safety and reduce injuries. The make-up of the safety committee can vary depending on the needs, size and type of the company. The committee should be comprised of an equal number of management and non-management and have representatives from all areas of the company.

So, now we know the benefits to both employee, and employer, but how do you start a safety committee or improve on what you have?

1. Begin by asking employee to volunteer. These individuals will have a true interest in the purpose and goals of the committee, but, what happens when not enough employees volunteer? If all fails the employer can select the employee representatives. Choose employees that have made suggestions to improve safety in the past.

Develop a mission statement that provides direction.

i.e. The mission of the (insert name of organization) Health and Safety Committee is to develop and promote a healthy and safe environment for all employees and visitors to our facilities through the involvement of all individuals with regards to education, communication and safe work practices.

2. Determine the committee structure
 - a. Who fills what role i.e., chairperson, secretary, committee members?
 - b. How long will individual fill these roles and are there any alternates?

- c. How often will the committee meet?
 - d. How will decision be made within the committee?
 - e. Define the responsibilities of each member
 - i. Chairperson- shall have the responsibility of making the agenda for each meeting and ensuring that each member receives a copy before each meeting. The chair person shall run the meetings and ensure that they stick to the agenda and only discuss relevant topics.
 - ii. Secretary- shall take minutes for each meeting and ensure that each member receives such minutes after each meeting. Actively promote safety and health by personal example and communicate with employees, and management.
 - iii. Team members- shall ensure that they attend each meeting and be an active participant. When unable to attend a meeting the member shall ensure that a replacement attends the meeting from his or her department.
 - f. Establish how you will communicate with management
3. Determine the purpose, duties and overall goals of your safety committees.
- a. Identify unsafe work practices and conditions and suggest appropriate remedies.
 - b. Conduct health and safety inspections of both operations and facilities, identify safety hazards and recommend corrective measures.
 - c. Review accident/incident reports. Types of accidents, causes and trends shall be identified and appropriate corrective action suggested.
 - d. Obtain and analyze available data on past injuries and illnesses and identify trends and suggest appropriate corrective actions.
 - e. Assist in the development and implementation of effective health and safety awareness programs.
 - f. Encourage feedback from all individuals with regard to health and safety related ideas, problems, and solutions.
 - g. Provide support and serve as a resource in the development, implementation, and maintenance of a comprehensive safety, loss prevention and loss control program.
 - h. Serve as an advisory body to management on health and safety issues.
 - i. Providing suggestions and recommendations for resolution of health and safety concerns.
4. Develop an agenda for the meeting, this should help to keep everyone on-track. i.e.
- a. Record of attendance
 - b. Previous month's meeting minutes
 - c. Follow up actions
 - d. Review recent accidents/injuries
 - e. Inspection reports

- f. Special projects or presentations
- j. Meeting minutes should be distributed to all members, posted for all company employees to read, as well as sent to management.

Avoid some common pitfalls such as:

Lack of purpose- Does your committee know what it's supposed to be doing? Has the safety committee set clear goals? Without a clear purpose, no group can work effectively.

Top-heavy management representation- Who is on your safety committee? A member of management should be involved, but remember that the point is to get workers involved.

No budget. A committee should be considered an investment, and management needs to provide adequate tools and resources. Funds may be needed for member training, safety and health fairs, and other activities.

Failure to orient new members- New members may be unaware of the group dynamics and past issues. Provide new members with minutes and other documents.

Lack of communication- Share your successes to both employees and management. Focus on positive things such as the number of safety talks completed or improvements that are made. Recognize members for joining or departing the committee.

Lack of follow-up- Committees can rise and fall on their reputation for doing what they say they will do. Committee leaders should request formal status reports and should review assignments at the end of each meeting to keep everyone on the same page. Many committee agendas list not only the topic to be discussed but also the person responsible for seeing the issue through.

Lacks of employee participation- The best members are active, involved participants who eagerly share their passion for safety with their coworkers. Leaders should find ways to get all members involved and fully representing their department or work group.

Same old, same old - Committees must innovate to maintain interest and involvement. Encourage leaders to learn about successful committees at other businesses and borrow good ideas. Plan a committee-led safety day or safety mentor program. Canvass employees to make sure their good ideas are getting through. Ask a safety committee member to address your board of directors annually so that those at the top are aware of the committee's activities.