

Roles of Health and Safety Committees

A health and safety committee can be an important way to improve conditions on the job. The committee provides a forum for employees and management to work together to solve health and safety problems. An effective committee can help prevent injury and illness on the job; increase awareness of health and safety issues among workers, supervisors, and managers; and develop strategies to make the work environment safe and healthy.

The following is a list of some possible roles of a health and safety committee.

Hazard Identification, Evaluation, and Control

- Review injury data, accident reports, and workers' compensation records.
- Conduct regular walkaround inspections to identify potential health and safety hazards.
- Conduct safety and health job analyses to identify problems.



Hazard Identification, Evaluation, and Control

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- Design and conduct health and safety surveys.
- Collect and review Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs).
- Propose and evaluate various ways to improve safety conditions.
- Get recommendations acted upon.
- Review and evaluate corrective actions taken by management.
- Temporarily “shut down” unsafe operations until a hazard is corrected.
- Collect and review information on new chemicals, procedures, and processes before they are introduced.
- Participate in studies conducted by outside researchers or consultants.
- Establish or improve procedures for employees to report safety hazards or suggest improvements without fear of reprisal.

Information and Education

- Respond to concerns raised by workers, supervisors and managers.
- Recommend training for new employees, supervisors, and managers and refresher training on health and safety practices, procedures and emergency response.
- Plan and organize training programs.
- Establish or improve procedures for employees to report health symptoms without fear of reprisal.
- Keep workers, supervisors, and managers informed about the committee’s activities.

Accident/Incident Investigations

- Investigate accidents, including their root causes.
- Establish procedures for reviewing reports of all safety incidents, including accidents, illnesses and deaths.
- Review accident/incident reports and make recommendations for appropriate corrective action.
- Develop systems for reporting accidents and “near misses.”

Safety and Health Planning

- Establish procedures to review inspection reports.
- Recommend and track new safety and health rules and work practices.
- Review proposed equipment purchases and make recommendations.
- Regularly review and evaluate the employer’s Health and Safety Program.
- Develop a tracking system that enables the committee to monitor progress on safety issues.



Making Health and Safety Committees Effective

Committee Membership and Procedures



- Make sure there is equal representation of workers and managers.
- Have workers or their union pick their own representatives.
- Make sure there are senior managers on the committee who have the authority to make decisions.
- Choose members who will be active and productive team players. Both management and employee representatives should be fully committed to the committee's work.
- Make sure management and employee representatives share responsibility for setting agendas and goals, chairing meetings, and taking on specific tasks.
- Agree on guidelines for effective communication and mutual respect among committee members.
- Establish procedures for employees to report hazards or suggest safety improvements to the committee without fear of reprisal.

Resources Needed

- Secure support from all levels of the organization to commit adequate time and resources to make the committee successful.
- Make sure all members receive enough training to be effective on the committee.
- Provide adequate paid work time for members to attend meetings and carry out their committee responsibilities.
- Ensure that committee members have access to the worksite and to all relevant information necessary to carry out their duties.
- Use outside experts, as needed.

Planning the Meeting

- Plan the meeting with management and worker representatives, including prioritizing the topics that should be covered and when and where the meeting will be held.
- Send the agenda and other relevant committee information to committee members and other interested parties at least five days prior to the meeting.
- Review minutes from the last meeting and check on the status of any pending actions.
- Review any concerns and suggestions from workers or supervisors so they can be brought to the committee.



Running a Productive Meeting

- Start on time.
- Establish the ground rules:
 - Ensure there is agreement on process. For example, will disagreements be resolved by formal votes?
 - Maintain open and balanced discussion, and make sure everyone has an equal chance to speak.
 - Define and agree upon roles and responsibilities.
 - Keep the focus on safety and health issues. Do not allow personal attacks.
- Seek approval of the agenda by participants. Revise if needed.
- Introduce new members and guests.
- Set clear time limits for discussion of agenda items.
- Review action items from the previous meeting.
- Try to make progress on smaller steps while working toward larger objectives.
- Keep good minutes of the meeting to document decisions made.
- Establish action items and responsibilities: Who, what, and when?
- Set the date, time, and place of the next meeting, and develop a preliminary agenda.
- Evaluate the meeting. Were expectations met? Was the agenda followed? Were problems resolved? Can future meetings be improved?
- Close the meeting on time and on a positive note.

Meeting Follow-up

- Prepare the meeting minutes.
- Distribute and/or post the minutes.
- Follow up on action items and publicize your successes.