

# How to develop an effective safety committee

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A company safety committee can play a decisive role in reducing the extent and severity of work-related injuries and illnesses.

**By Andrew Mauschaugh**

**A safety committee should bring workers and management together to promote safety and health in the workplace.**

**T**he federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration has concluded that effective management of worker safety and health protection is a decisive factor in reducing the extent and severity of work-related injuries and illnesses. One of the most effective means of accomplishing this is by establishing a company safety committee. The difference between success and failure of this type of committee lies with the original purpose, staffing, structure and management support received while carrying out its responsibilities.

A safety committee should bring workers and management together in a cooperative effort to promote safety and health in the workplace. The safety committee is a group of individuals who aid and advise management and employees on matters of safety and health pertaining to company operations.

There are many benefits of a strong safety and health program, including:

- Improving employee morale and productivity.
- Reducing worker compensation costs and other less obvious costs of work-related injuries and illnesses.
- Enabling the company to continue to provide a safe, healthy place to work.

## Committee member selection

The safety committee should represent all facets of the operation: management, supervisors, laborers, maintenance and office personnel. At least one

representative from each department should be on the committee.

The committee serves as a forum for discussing changes in regulations, programs or processes and potential new hazards. Employees on the committee should be able to communicate problems to management openly and face to face. With many minds addressing a problem simultaneously, with so much thought power concentrating on an issue, effective solutions are more easily produced.

Each employee should have an equal chance to participate on the committee. A lottery system can be used. The length of tenure can be determined in part by company size. A small company may choose to have a one-year membership. A medium- to large-size company may opt for semi-annual or quarterly membership.

The committee should be under the direction of the senior-most management official appointed to the committee.

## Basic operating principles

The frequency of meetings will be determined by the loss exposure at the company, but is preferably no less than monthly. A company with very few losses overall and no significant losses may opt for quarterly meetings. A company with several or significant losses may opt for weekly meetings.

Meetings should be conducted during regular business hours. If meetings are completed outside of regular

business hours, committee members should be credited for the time.

### Facility safety inspections

Monthly workplace safety inspections and documentation help monitor adherence to safety programs. A member of the safety committee should lead the inspection. Department representatives should participate in the inspection of their departments.

Focus inspections on physical hazards and unsafe acts or operations. Start with areas or operations that show up as causes of accidents in previous inspections and in the quarterly loss analysis (include fire hazards, security and other life-threatening areas).

Correct any unsafe conditions and report the results at the next meeting. Create a to do list of recommendations and assign people to correct them.

### Quarterly loss analysis report

Before the safety committee can make the workplace safer, it needs to identify accident trends and causes that can make it unsafe. This is the role of the quarterly loss analysis report, which goes into more detail than the monthly one. The committee should follow up on and correct any trend. Contact your insurance company loss control department for assistance.

### Safety in-services

In-service education increases safety and health awareness among employees, informs them about changes in procedure and addresses specific areas identified by inspections. Develop an annual schedule to ensure all content is covered. Additional in-services can be provided as necessary, prompted by high frequency of accidents, employee turnover or expansion or reduction of staff.

Document and file all training and attendance. In addition, each employee's file should have a cumulative record of the in-service

meetings attended. Your insurance company loss control department can also help with safety training.

### Annual safety report

The safety committee should produce a report each year to summarize its actions. The reports serve as guideposts for future committee members. Submit the report to the administrator or risk manager for review and comment. Include the

## Safety committee responsibilities

Here are activities that a safety committee should be responsible for:

- Investigate any workplace accidents and analyze accident and injury data.
- Review supervisors' accident reports.
- Identify accident causes and discuss solutions for preventing recurrences.
- Submit proposed corrective actions for review. Follow up.
- Review safety inspection results.
- Ensure that workplace hazards are detected and eliminated or safeguarded.
- Submit possible solutions to upper management. Follow up.
- Compile and distribute safety and health information.
- Document and post committee proceedings.
- Inform employees about safety and health issues (can use posters, handouts and check stuffers).
- Review and update work practices and hazard controls.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of health and safety recommendations.
- Develop safety promotional programs.
- Set an example for other employees.

## Sample safety meeting agenda

1. Call to order.
2. Record members present.
3. Read minutes from last meeting.
4. Review any unfinished business.
5. Discuss safety promotional ideas.
6. Discuss training needs.
7. Review any accidents or near-misses.
8. Discuss inspection findings.
9. Review recommendations, suggestions or complaints.
10. Review new rules, regulations or communications.
11. Ask for new business.
12. Set a date for the next meeting.
13. Adjournment.

The length should not exceed one hour.

year's accomplishments, continuing accident and incident trends, action plans to modify trends or significant safety issues, and the in-service schedule for the next year.

### Safety suggestion program

If your company has a safety suggestion box, the committee should review each suggestion at its regular meetings. If suggestions are implemented, employees should receive recognition for their ideas. This could include a company shirt, cap or another giveaway. In addition, the employee should be recognized on a bulletin board or newsletter. For suggestions that can't be implemented, the committee should thank them for their ideas and briefly explain why.

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