



Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



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SAFETY & HEALTH COMMITTEES

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

Safety committees came into existence almost 85 years ago when mill employees at Kimberly Clark / Neenah Paper Company formed one of the first documented groups. Since that time, safety committees, and more recently safety and health committees have been formed in virtually all industries in the USA.

Safety and health committees are groups that aid and advise both management and employees on issues pertaining to the safety and health of company personnel. A safety committee affords both employees and management a formal platform to discuss, investigate and set into place action plans to improve the safety and health of all company personnel.

Active committees take on very lofty goals. One of the most important is being a “results” focused group. Where *both* employees and the company bring issues to the table for review or action. Active committees perform essential safety related monitoring, education, investigation and evaluative tasks as well. Because of this, safety and health committees can be invaluable to the injury prevention process. However, without dynamic participation, strong employee and company support, committees can also be unproductive and ineffective. The difference between success and failure lies with the primary objectives of the committee, its staffing, structure, and the support it receives carrying out its responsibilities. Safety and health committees will not function effectively without guidance and pre-determined rules to guide the committee.

Committee Member Makeup

There are many types of safety committees. They may include representatives of both management and workers, only worker representatives, or just first-line supervisors. In most cases, committees with both management and workers are probably the most effective and productive.

Management personnel have the opportunity to make a significant positive impact to a committee, or they can degrade its capabilities. Top-level managers who are on the safety committee, and take a serious interest in safety and health, can be highly effective. They provide the committee with a direct contact to upper management when policy or procedural changes need to be instituted. However, managerial personnel can also erode the committee’s capabilities. This happens if the manager dominates the meeting, misses meetings, leaves early, or does not focus on committee business objectives when in attendance. A negative unspoken message is sent to workers by these managers, that the company’s management does not consider the committee or safety important, or that as a manager there are more important tasks to do elsewhere.

The goal of setting a safety committee’s make-up is to ensure active employee participation. Some states, such as Washington, mandate committees and the type of membership. In such a plan the safety committee must be made up of employee-elected and employer-selected members. Employee-elected members must make up at least 50% of the

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membership. To help ensure fresh ideas and active participation, employee-elected members have a maximum one-year term. However, only one or two members should be replaced on a committee at any one time to help maintain continuity within the group.

Any committee, no matter how composed, should include the company's safety coordinator, who should not be a voting member. He or she can provide guidance and information on any matter before committee. The coordinator can offer opinions on whether a reported hazard actually constitutes a problem, or whether a suggested proposal is technically feasible. They can also help locate codes or standards regarding the problem raised. The entire Safety Committee should work closely with the Safety Director and the safety department staff.

Safety & Health Committee Basics

Like any organized group, when it is formed, the first order of business is to set the group's ground rules—what are the committee's primary objectives? Who will be chairperson? Who will document the meetings? These basics will govern the committee, install policies to handle issues brought to the committee, and help address any problems that develop.

The objectives of the team should be set first. They must be concise and written down. All objectives must be within the grasp of the committee. Examples are: promote safety and health awareness; prevent accidents; prevent injuries and illnesses; improve production and quality through safer methods; or instill strong safety values within the company.

Meetings of the committee should be scheduled on a regular basis. The most common frequency is monthly. Enough time should be provided to ensure that each item is given due consideration. However, the chairperson must ensure that the meetings are confined to safety matters, discussions are confined to the items at hand, a minimum of time is wasted, and the meeting is adjourned as soon as committee business is accomplished. Reading the committee's objectives at the start of each meeting is a way of working toward this goal, and keeping the focus of the meeting on the committee's primary job.

Once the objectives are set, the committee should develop a list of what they intend to discuss at each and every meeting. This list makes up the format of the Safety Committee Meeting report.

Safety Committee Meeting Report

A safety committee meeting report can be the 'newspaper' to the company on what is being addressed. The report also provides a set agenda for each meeting. The meeting report must be closely linked to the committee's responsibilities. These should include such things as:

- Review of all safety hazards, complaints or suggestions.
- Review of all accident investigation reports-- focusing on the root cause of each injury, the corrective actions completed, the appropriateness of the actions, and if the report was complete in its detail.
- Review committee member department safety audit reports.
- Review the Safety Program for its effectiveness.

The flow of information should be detailed. To be effective, the committee must receive company-wide input, and promptly communicate its response on all issues. The best avenue for this is a Safety Committee Meeting Report. The report should be based on a standard business meeting format, with additions to ensure all items are reported on. Minutes should be taken throughout the meeting, so an accurate report can be developed. These minutes can then be posted in locations throughout the facility so all employees and staff have the opportunity to see the issues discussed and the action-plans developed. A sample Safety Committee Report form is attached to this SSU.

Always remember the objectives of the committee. Also realize that if the employees do not receive feedback from ideas they submit, they may stop submitting them. Any worker who makes a written or oral suggestion, or indicates the existence of a hazard to a committee member should receive a written response about the actions that have or will be taken, if any. An expression of thanks for an interest in safety is always a positive note to add in the response. If the matter requires further consideration, the worker should be notified. One effective means is to forward a copy of the meeting minutes to the worker which shows that their concerns were addressed. The worker should be identified in the minutes by name, job title, and department.

When an item must be brought to the attention of management for consideration or action, a suitable method should be developed to do so. One means is the meeting minutes themselves, by indicating in the opening paragraph the items to which consideration is being given or action is being taken. A copy of the minutes can then be sent to the responsible manager.

A committee member should keep a log of all items considered, those that are rejected and why, those forwarded for further action, and those accomplished. If a reply is not received within a reasonable time regarding an item that has been forwarded for consideration or action, the person to whom it was forwarded should be queried. Each matter should be pursued until a final decision is reached, no action items should be pigeonholed.

Responsibilities

The safety and health committee, in conjunction with the Safety Department and the company management, can have many valuable responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

- Actively participating in safety and health instruction programs and evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. Promote safety and health awareness programs.
- Recommend suitable hazard elimination or reduction measures in conjunction with the Safety Department.
- Immediately investigate any workplace accident as part of the investigation team. This includes making recommendations for prevention.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of safety and health recommended improvements, or suggested accident investigation corrective actions.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of loss control and safety education programs, and recommend changes as necessary.
- Periodically review the accident experience of the total company and its individual departments.
- Develop organization-wide safety rules and disciplinary actions.
- Periodically review and update existing work practices and hazard controls.
- Regularly inspect the facilities to detect unsafe conditions, unsafe practices, hazardous materials and environmental issues. This can be a rotating responsibility for members.
- Work with management and the Safety Department in planning improvements to existing safety and health rules and procedures.
- Develop safety recognition programs or safety incentives for employee input and management approval.
- Assess the safety implications of changes in work tasks, operations and processes.
- Review safety materials, including slides, films, and written materials and recommend safety education and training strategies.
- Determining committee membership, procedures and meeting schedules.

The job of a safety committee is critical. It helps the entire company focus upon injury prevention. The actions of an effective safety and health committee builds teamwork, strengthens morale, and helps to keep the company's workforce safe.

SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date & Time of Committee Meeting: _____

Committee Chairperson: _____

Employee Representatives

Employee Representatives

Employer Representatives: _____

Visitors/Guests: _____

A. OLD BUSINESS

B. NEW BUSINESS

C. ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS REVIEW & STATISTICAL INFO (WHEN APPLICABLE)

D. DEPARTMENTAL SELF-INSPECTION COMMENTS:

E. NOTES, SUGGESTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS TO UPPER MANAGEMENT:

F. ACTION TO BE TAKEN (INCLUDE COMPLETION TIME-FRAMES):

Safety Committee Chairperson (signature)

Date

Safety Director (signature)

Date