



How Effective is Your Safety Committee?

It's no secret that when it comes to safety, prevention is the best strategy to avoid incidents and injuries in the workplace. While a safety committee can be a valuable tool for prevention of incidents, the effectiveness of the committee is directly related to its structure. When evaluating or forming a safety committee, following a few keys to success and avoiding typical flaws can have a positive impact on incident and injury numbers, employee communication and morale, and insurance premiums.

1. Appoint a safety committee chairperson. Often, safety committees are comprised solely of volunteers. Having a paid safety committee chairperson with clear job responsibilities and outlined goals will assert the importance of safety to employees, ensure regular committee meetings, and allow the employer to hold someone accountable for taking the necessary steps to implement proposed committee actions.

2. Allow employees to elect remaining committee members.

Ask employees to volunteer to run for a seat, or nominate coworkers to run for a seat on the safety committee. Holding committee elections will instill a sense of pride in elected members, and will assure employees that they have a voice through their elected committee. Employees will typically make good choices when selecting committee members, and will often choose co-workers who have influence in their departments.

3. Limit the number of management/supervisory personnel on the committee.

Managers and supervisors often are very knowledgeable about workplace safety, they are not necessarily involved in the day-to-day situations that will need to be addressed by the committee. A committee with non-management members chosen by their peers may be more likely to be made aware of issues that may not otherwise be brought to the committee's attention. Employees are often more comfortable bringing safety issues to a peer representative, who can then take those concerns to the committee.

4. Ensure each department is represented.

A safety committee with a member from each department within a company has a fully encompassing "safety net". Furthermore, limiting the number of representatives from each department will help to ensure that committee members are dedicated to the committee and to workplace safety overall.

5. Empower your safety committee.

Safety committee members should be empowered (and expected) to plan, organize, coordinate and, most importantly, participate in the safety process. Review the committee's progress each year in order to evaluate its success in helping the company attain its safety goals and objectives.

6. Limit committee representatives' terms.

Establish a term length for committee members to allow for rotation of representatives. Electing new representatives every two or three years will allow for fresh ideas and concerns to be brought to the committee's attention. The method used to staff a safety committee is vital to the committee's effectiveness. Employers need to be vigilant in their efforts to provide a safe environment for their employees and the public, and an efficient safety committee is a great way for employers to be made aware of issues that can often be corrected without incident. How effective is your safety committee?

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