



SAFETY COMMITTEE

A Safety Committee, or as it is sometimes referred to a "Joint Health and Safety Committee", is a group of employer and employee representatives who work together to identify and recommend solutions to health and safety problems in the workplace.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act requires a minimum of two members, one of whom must represent the workers. There is no mandatory maximum. The number will vary from workplace to workplace.

Whether or not your company comes under the jurisdiction of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, having a Safety Committee in place is an important part of your safety program. Having a safety committee will also reinforce to your employees your company's commitment to health and safety.

JOINT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

It is important that there be a record of Safety Committee meetings. The minutes need not be complex, however, it is necessary to record:

- date and time of meeting
- names of those present
- issues discussed
- recommendations
- person/group responsible for action

In some instances it may be useful to attach pertinent documents to the minutes (e.g. audit reports, management responses, accident statistics).

Minutes should be posted on appropriate bulletin boards so that all employees have access to the information.

Sample of minutes layout follows.

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Objectives of a Health and Safety Committee

What are some objectives we should consider for a health and safety committee? To put it another way - what are some of the duties of a safety committee?

1. The study of injury and disease statistics and trends so that reports can be made to management on unsafe and unhealthy conditions and practices, together with recommended corrective action.
2. Examination of safety and health audits on a similar basis as indicated in first objective.
3. Consideration of reports provided by government and insurance inspectors.
4. Consideration of reports by safety representatives.
5. Assist management in the development of job site safety rules.
6. Review the effectiveness of health and safety training of employees.
7. Review and assist in communication and promotion of health and safety matters in the workplace.
8. Carry out periodic safety and health audits to determine the effectiveness of programming.

Making Recommendations

In making recommendations, there are two important issues to be decided: first, on what does the committee make recommendations and second, how is a recommendation made?

Recommendation on What?

Generally speaking, concerns which do require a committee recommendation are:

- those for which there is no established corrective procedure
- where a request for corrective action brings no result
- where the problem involves a number of different departments and requires a change in procedure

For example:

- a mezzanine floor with no perimeter rail, not previously thought of as hazardous
- excessive welding fumes tolerated in the past, but now being complained about
- recurrence of a housekeeping defect. The real problem could be lack of proper storage facilities, poor methods of performing the job concerned, etc.
- a problem which relates to lack of information or training for personnel

Making a Recommendation

Recommendations which relate to well defined problems and which are logical, supported by facts, and practical, are the ones most likely to be accepted by the employer.

To achieve this, committees should follow a logical procedure in developing recommendations. For example:

1. Define the problem. This often means looking for underlying causes of the situation. Unless the real problem is identified, it is difficult to come up with solutions. For example, simply defining the problem as "careless work habits" is not enough. Ask, "Are work procedures properly defined and communicated? Is the proper safety equipment readily available? Is there adequate training and information for the workers' concerned?"
2. Assemble all necessary information. All background information should be collected and then considered before coming up with solutions. Such information might include:
 - description of the job and workplace
 - details about any previous accidents and investigations relating to this problem
 - comments and suggestions from supervisors and workers
 - equipment maintenance schedules and manufacturers' specifications
3. Consider possible solutions. Solutions must relate directly to the problem identified. Provide options for different solutions if possible. In considering solutions, the committee should take into account:
 - the urgency and potential seriousness of the problem
 - the range of possible solutions - sometimes the corrective action being proposed may be urgent, but there may be practical or cost difficulties in getting these implemented immediately; in such a case, the committee may wish to recommend interim solutions
 - the practicality of the solution being recommended
4. Reach agreement. This may sometimes be more difficult than it sounds. However, it is easier to reach a unanimous agreement when the information gathering has been done using a step by step procedure.
5. Present the recommendation. The nature and the reasoning behind the recommendation should be clearly set out. Those who have to consider it will then have the benefit of the committee's deliberations. The recommendation should include:
 - the subject of the recommendation
 - the date made
 - the recommended time frame for action
 - the recommendation, including any options
 - the reasoning behind the recommendation
 - time frame for response

The recommendation should be sent to the person in the company who has the necessary authority to take action.