

Safety Spotlight

Basic Elements of Effective In-House Safety Committees

What are Safety Committees?

A safety or health and safety committee is "an organizational structure where members represent a group, giving everyone a voice." These committees aid and advise management and employees about safety and health pertaining to a company's operations.¹ Committees should consist of both management and labor; in smaller businesses, a few people representing labor and management should meet regularly to discuss safety issues whereas larger organizations may require more than one committee.²

Tips for an Effective Safety Committee

An effective safety committee must have management support to carry out its responsibilities.

Successful safety committees perform a combination of the following duties:

- **Review accident investigation forms.** Committees should review any new accident investigation forms at each meeting. Creating and using a universal accident investigation form that is distributed to all supervisors can help prevent future accidents while also making it easy for the committee to review them.⁴
- **Conduct workplace inspections.** Committees should develop a safety review and inspection process to identify operational hazards and observe employee work methods. Periodic inspections allow organizations to gauge the effectiveness of efforts. Be sure to look for: workplace environmental hazards, workstation set-up, modified work tasks, and employees' awareness of situations.⁴ Take into consideration any applicable input from employees, supervisors, and management.²
- **Promote safety education and training.** Keeping safety in front of employees will remind them of its importance and will increase awareness of hazards. Safety orientation should be provided to all workers – especially new employees – to ensure they are familiar with the hazards of the workplace and know how to complete their job duties safely.⁴ Demonstrations should be provided for the proper use of safety equipment and procedures, when applicable.²
- **Look for claim trends.** Analyze patterns in your workers' compensation claims focusing on: body part, cause of injury, and result of injury. Look for patterns in other data – i.e., occupation, business location, department, shift, and supervisor – to help narrow down when, where, and why certain injuries occur.⁴

¹ "Tips and Tactics for a Stronger, More Effective Safety Committee." *Safety Committees Reference Materials*, BLR, 16 Sept. 2016, [safety.blr.com/workplace-safety-reference-materials/white-papers/safety-administration/safety-committees/Tips-and-tactics-for-a-stronger-more-effective-saf/](https://www.safety.blr.com/workplace-safety-reference-materials/white-papers/safety-administration/safety-committees/Tips-and-tactics-for-a-stronger-more-effective-saf/).

² "Safety Committees." *New York State Insurance Fund*, New York State Insurance Fund, [ww3.nysif.com/Home/Employer/InjuryAndIllnessPrevention/SafetyCommittee](https://www3.nysif.com/Home/Employer/InjuryAndIllnessPrevention/SafetyCommittee).



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The safety committee should be a visible and approachable body for safety, health complaints, and suggestions whose accomplishments are publicized in order to acknowledge the committees' success and reinforce the effort of its members.¹

The following suggestions are ways in which organizations can build more effective and enjoyable workplace safety committees:³

- **Put progression before perfection at the start.** When creating a safety committee for your organization, begin the process with immediate as well as long term goals without trying to aim too high initially.³ Developing a mission statement – a clear expression of management's goals and expectations for the group – can provide the committee with guidelines that help it meet requirements.²
- **Embrace variety.** Since workplaces consist of employees with varied positions and backgrounds, ensure your safety committee includes a mix of your organization's labor force and management.³
- **Develop a basic curriculum.** Provide training and materials to boost committee members' knowledge and recognition of workplace safety and health hazards, as well as ways to avoid and prevent them.³ Use the meeting time to discuss accident prevention methods, safety promotion, hazards noted on inspections, and other relevant topics (i.e., incidents that resulted in injury as well as "near misses" that didn't).⁴
- **Plan meetings ahead of time.** Develop agendas for committee meetings a few days in advance and distribute them so committee members can properly prepare.³
- **Maintain a reasonable rotation among committee members.** Take into consideration the size of your organization and the committee when deciding on the best committee member rotation schematic.³ It is important for the committee to systematically rotate in new members for fresh ideas and energy.²
- **Don't be boring.** While there should be an overall structure to the meetings, using exercises before the traditional reading of minutes, inviting occasional guest speakers, and scheduling some meetings at a nearby restaurant, museum, or park can help keep meetings from becoming too mundane.³
- **Occasionally look outward.** Try to look at other organizations or even other industries to see what they are doing for their safety committees to add variety to yours.³

³ Druley, Kevin. "7 Tips for an Effective Workplace Safety Committee." *Safety Health Magazine*, 26 Feb. 2017, www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/15308-tips-for-an-effective-workplace-safety-committee.

⁴ "Safety Committee Activity Ideas and Best Practices." *SFM Mutual Insurance*, SFM Mutual Insurance, 19 Feb. 2019, www.sfmic.com/expert-tips-to-make-your-safety-committee-thrive/.



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Things to Avoid

While there are many ways to promote a successful safety committee, there are some common mistakes that committees should attempt to avoid and/or resolve if they arise.

These mistakes include:¹

- Roles on the committee not being clearly defined.
- The committee is too big or too small.
- New members are not adequately trained.
- No formal meeting agenda(s).
- Lack of follow-up on action items.
- Inadequate communication between committee members and/or the committee and outside groups (i.e., employees not on the committee).
- Domination of the committee by management and/or lack of employee participation.
- Inability to adapt to change, as necessary.
- Insufficient budget.
- Shifting focus of the committee and its meetings to non-safety related items.²



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