

## Sample Safety Committee Plan

### Why a Safety Committee?

At first glance, a Safety Committee might seem an extravagant use of time, people and resources. However, if effectively formed and utilized, a Safety Committee will more than make up for the effort needed to create and maintain it. It has been well established that organizations with an effective Safety Committee have fewer accidents and lower workers compensation costs. A good Safety Committee will foster a safety consciousness throughout your organization, reducing accidents, injuries, equipment damage and costs. Safety Committees are more successful when they are given broad responsibility and authority to effect change quickly and directly. It is essential to:

- Have the support of management. Absent management support, Safety Committees invariably fail.
- Gain the support of employees and participants
- Clearly state the role, goals and objectives of the Safety Committee
- Organize the Safety Committee and decide who will serve
- Clearly communicate the Safety Committee's mission and objectives

Management will set challenging, measurable but realistic goals for the safety program. If top management chooses to be a member of the Committee, then encourage all member's involvement and input. Management also must assume it will adopt some of the Safety Committee's recommendations. Any Safety Committee that has suggestions constantly ignored will fail. Resources and materials must be committed. This means financial and time commitments for safety equipment, training and inspections as well as space to conduct training. If top management elects not to be a member of the Safety Committee, periodic attendance by management will reinforce support and commitment.

Supervisors may need to release people for Safety Committee meetings, training, maintenance, cleanup, inspections and hazard mitigation.

Employees must be kept informed of safety plans and their input sought. Demonstrate that management and supervisors are committed and employees are also an important part of the effort. Employees need to have confidence that safety is more important than productivity.

If your organization is a union shop, unions must be part of the process. If unions do not feel they are participants in the process, they may pose obstacles to implementation even if they essentially agree with the objectives. If the purpose of the Safety Program and/or Safety Committee is not placed in the collective bargaining agreement, it is a good idea to do so, or at least establish it in a written policy.

Mission Statement:

A safety mission statement should be drafted. Typically this would include:

- The desire to unite all members of the organization to promote safety and health
- To do this in a cooperative and collaborative manner
- Management commitment to making it happen

The mission statement must be crafted in conjunction with the powers of the Safety Committee. The powers vested in the Safety Committee give it the authority to execute the mission.

Some things to consider:

- Will the Committee's role be strictly advisory, or will it have decision making power?
- If the Committee is empowered to make decisions, will the Committee execute those actions, or report decisions to someone else for implementation?
- Will the committee take a preventative approach to accidents, hazards or complaints, or will the committee only respond as these arise? A proactive approach is preferable.
- What will be the Committee's role in your organizations overall safety and health program?

How should our Safety Committee work?

It is helpful to state the purpose and role of the committee, which is to improve safety and health at your organization. This could include the following points:

- To promote and maintain the interest of employees in health and safety issues
- To educate managers, supervisors and employees by awareness and training activities that they are primarily responsible for the prevention of workplace accidents
- To make health and safety activities an integral part of the organization's operating procedures, culture and programs
- To provide opportunity for free discussion of health and safety problems and possible solutions
- To inform and educate employees and supervisors about health and safety issues, new standards, research findings, etc.
- To help reduce the risk of workplace injuries and illnesses
- To help insure compliance with federal and state health and safety standards

How does an effective Safety Committee do this?

An effective Safety Committee works as a team to:

- Develop, review and maintain written safety programs, policies and procedures
- Conduct internal workplace inspections and identify hazards
- Conduct periodic departmental or system wide safety audits
- Develop and facilitate safety training
- Investigate accidents to identify root cause
- Communicate safety issues to employees and management

- Organize and conduct safety meetings

Once the Committee's role is defined, it should be determined who will serve on the committee. For most organizations, a Committee of five to ten people will be large enough to enable broad representation throughout the organization and to allow delegation of particular responsibilities, but will not be too large to conduct effective meetings or coordinate activities. Ideally the Committee should be an equal mix of employee and management representatives. Members selected to serve of the committee should:

- Have broad contact with your organization's operations and areas of high risk and/or with large numbers of employees
- Have genuine interest and concern with workplace safety
- Have good communication skills
- Have safety and health knowledge or experience.

The objective is to have a group that can work together as a team in an atmosphere where issues can be freely raised and discussed. It is important to designate alternates for each member of the committee so all aspects of your organization are represented and to ensure that meetings are not frequently cancelled because an individual could not be present. If possible, at least one member should have budgetary authority. If your organization has them, safety officers, facilities managers and education/training managers could participate as members or on an ad hoc basis. If the Committee is empowered with decision making authority, members should be vested with authority to implement decisions made by the committee. Whatever the structure, the Committee must have sufficient power and authority to carry out its mission. Once formed, the Committee should determine who will chair the meetings. If your organization is sufficiently large, consider terms of service and rotating the chair periodically so that all areas of the organization will have an opportunity to participate and fresh perspectives can be brought to the group. It is understood this setup may not be possible for smaller organizations.

For small organizations a monthly or (at minimum) quarterly safety meeting involving all employees could be done. As these meetings, safety issue issues and concerns are discussed and recent incidents (including "near misses"), and injuries are reviewed. Some smaller organizations may decide to have a designated group, such as department heads fulfill the functions of the Safety Committee. This can work as long as meetings are held on a regular periodic basis and employee input is encouraged and solicited.

When the Committee is being organized, keep your organization informed. Let everyone know and ask for input. When the committee's role and initial goals are established, publish a newsletter. When the Committee is about to start operation, publish the names of the committee members, and let everyone know how they can participate.

## Empowering the Safety Committee

Meetings should be conducted on paid time, not as an extra after work commitment without pay. Committee members should have access and authority to execute any duties associated with the safety committee such as:

- Access to the entire facility for inspections, accident investigation, or investigations of complaints
- Review and comment on plans for acquisition or purchase of new equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment
- Review and input on management and/or union plans to rectify workplace hazards
- Access to records on planning, finance and new technology
- A budget of its own

## Operating the Committee:

The Committee should elect or designate a Chair and Secretary. This provides a focal point for communication as well as responsibility for conducting meetings and taking minutes. **Regular meetings are essential.** This cannot be emphasized enough. Meetings conducted at irregular intervals or that are postponed frequently will result in the Committee fizzling out altogether. Regularly scheduled meetings make everyone aware of the required time commitment and enables everyone to adjust their schedules and plan on attending. Generally the Committee should meet once or twice a month.

Meetings that take place on less than a quarterly basis are seldom productive.

## Conducting Safety Committee Meetings:

An agenda should be drafted and distributed to participants before a meeting. Publishing and using an agenda will allow members to prepare for the meeting, help keep discussion on track, make sure important issues are not forgotten and provide written documentation of the Committee's efforts.

Short overviews or summaries of safety training topics can and should be brought to Safety committee meetings. Topics are determined by the Committee and assigned to different members who are given considerable discretion on how they wish to present the topic. However, highly technical and time consuming training should be conducted separately.

Minutes are another essential. The Committee secretary should format minutes to reflect the agenda and include

- Attendee names
- Accidents reported and Accident Reviews done since last meeting
- Completed and Uncompleted recommendations
- Summary of safety efforts
- Safety training activities (pending and completed)
- Summary of outstanding items for discussion at the next meeting. New tasks or responsibilities assigned, timing and cost for execution.

Management may wish to add other information or reports for management use or general distribution. This may include status reports on goals, trending on accidents reported, highlights on safety efforts and/or recognition of individual or team efforts.



### Periodic Review

Operation of the Safety Committee should be reviewed annually at a minimum, and more frequent review may be warranted depending on the size and operations of your organization. The original mission statement should be reviewed along with goals and objectives, accomplishments and challenges remaining. Serious gaps or problems may become evident, especially in the first year. This is an opportunity to review operation of the Committee and make adjustments. After three months use a meeting to review the Committee's structure, mission and meetings. Make any adjustments agreed upon by the Committee. At the six month point, review the Committee's responsibilities, management support and workforce involvement, and make any adjustments agreed upon by the Committee.

Another possibility is to use the same checklists and have management and labor complete responses separately. If there appears to be a disconnection in perceptions on how the Committee is functioning, try to determine why these differences exist.

At the end of the first year, review the Committees results. Check the OSHA 300 logs. Are reported accidents increasing or declining? Were there any severe accidents? Was appropriate Accident Investigation done for each, and root cause established? Look at inspection reports and committee meetings. It is possible reported injuries and hazards will actually go up in the first year due to heightened awareness and more accurate reporting. This is not necessarily a bad thing as it means the Safety Committee is detecting the issues and can now work to address them.

Finally, share the results with the workforce and include a specific plan to address issues. This demonstrates management's commitment to the safety effort.

After the first year, operation will likely be more routine, however regular reviews are still essential to make sure the Committee is keeping on track and the overall safety effort is moving in the right direction.

### Common Pitfalls

- No mission statement or no clearly defined role for the committee's existence. (Why are we here?)
- Much talk, but no decisions and no action. The Committee must have realistic objectives, a plan for achieving them, decision making authority and a means of implementing decisions made.
- Meetings are not intended to be gripe sessions. Discussion should focus on legitimate safety issues.
- Appointed committee members who are not experienced, interested, or see the committee participation as just an additional burden.
- No plan, no schedule, no agenda. Meeting times should be clearly communicated in advance so participants can plan their schedules accordingly. Agendas should be also communicated in advance of meetings (preferably along with the meeting announcement) so agenda topics can be researched or investigated and additional items brought up if necessary.
- One voice dominates all discussion, other members are discouraged from participating or providing input.



- No minutes are taken. What was discussed? What did the Committee decide? Who is going to implement the decision and how? Minutes should be distributed within a week after the meeting.

#### Safety Committee Planning Guide

#### General Organization of Safety Committees

- Management/the board of selectmen/the town council should announce the formation of the Safety Committee officially. This should include a brief description of the committee's function, current membership, and should solicit cooperation from all departments.
- The safety committee should have the full backing of management if they are to function effectively. Management should monitor the committee to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.
- Safety committees should have access to and communication with top management through direct reporting or via distribution of the minutes to all key management officers and department heads.
- The committee membership should have knowledge of their work area, interest in supporting safety, and have the support of their peers.

#### Typical Duties of a Committee

- Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of the Safety Committee officers and members.
- Investigate and review serious injuries as soon as possible to determine root cause and prevent recurrence.
- Review incidents, near misses, Accident Investigation Reports, claim summaries and loss trending on a periodic basis.
- Organize and/or perform periodic facility safety inspections and audits, report unsafe conditions and suggest corrective actions. Inspections should be cooperative in nature and include employee and management representatives. Note not just the negative but the positive conditions in the workplace. Consider rewards for a good inspection outcome.
- Develop, implement, and review written safety programs, safety procedures and checklists.
- Direct involvement with organizational wide safety training.
- Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvements in safety.
- Publicly acknowledge and recognize accomplishments; build enthusiasm for safety programs. Broadcasting success makes others want to be part of the safety effort.
- Publicize committee activities. E-mail or post minutes or notices, put articles in bulletin boards, newsletters. Solicit participation and input!
- Sponsor and coordinate contests, poster programs, safety drives; etc., and supply other informational materials which can help to promote safer operations.

#### Setting Goals

- Goals should be measurable and achievable.
- Goals should be designated as short term, 1-6 months and long term, greater than 6 months.



- Goals should be reviewed periodically to determine the effectiveness of the committee and to reset or restate goal targets.

#### Safety Committee Meeting Agenda

Committee Chairman/Safety Manager should call the meeting to order, the secretary should take minutes of the meeting, if the secretary is not present, the chair should designate a member to take minutes and proceed with business. The following is a possible example:

#### Call to Order

- Call meeting to order, introduce any guests, speakers, agenda changes, etc.
- Read minutes of previous meeting. Note corrections or changes.

#### Old Business

- Discuss status of previously submitted recommendations.
- Request status report on any other pending old business.
- Set target dates for completion of recommendations and other pending items.
- Status report of goals and objectives.

#### Accident Review

- Brief summary of number and type of incidents reported since last meeting.
- Discuss severe or potentially severe cases including action to be taken or suggested to eliminate or minimize recurrence.
- Brief summary of number and type of accidents for the year to date. Discuss any negative trends.
- Evaluate effectiveness of accident investigation/prevention efforts. Are accident investigations appropriately done and root cause identified? If not, is more training on accident investigation needed?

#### Inspection Reports

- Report findings of safety inspections made by the committee members or others. Department operations should be inspected on a rotating basis.
- Discuss and decide on action to be recommended as a result of reports. Identify who will be responsible and establish time frame for action.

#### New Business

- Request committee members to submit safety suggestions (collaborate).
- Comment on new safety procedures, equipment, etc., of interest to the committee.
- Plan and schedule safety-training programs.
- Other new business
- Set time and date for next meeting (if not already scheduled)



\*The Maine Department of Labor - Safety Works also has useful information on establishing an effective safety culture.

Please visit their site at: [http://www.maine.gov/labor/workplace\\_safety/index.html](http://www.maine.gov/labor/workplace_safety/index.html)