

# Safety Committees

## Best Practice



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## **Why a Safety Committee?**

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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 membership with effective Safety Committees have fewer incidents and lower workers compensation costs. A good Safety Committee will foster a safety awareness throughout your organization, reducing incident, 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.
- Gain the support of all employees.
- Clearly state the role, goals and objectives of the Safety Committee's activities.
- Organize the Safety Committee and decide who will serve
- Clearly communicate the Safety Committee's mission and objectives.

Management should set challenging, measurable but realistic goals for the safety program. If top management chooses to be a member of the committee, then encourage all members' 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 and meetings. If top management elects not to be a member of the Safety Committee, periodic attendance by management will reinforce support and commitment.

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 membership is unionized, a union representative must be part of the committee. If unions are not participants in the process, they may pose obstacles to implementation even if they essentially agree with the objectives. If the purpose of the 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:**

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

- The desire to unite all members of the membership 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 authority of the Safety Committee. The powers vested in the Safety Committee give it the authority to execute the mission. Some things to consider:

- What will be the committee's role in your overall safety and health program?
- Will the committee's role be strictly advisory, or will it have decision making authority?
- The committee should be proactive in preventing incidents.

## **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. This could include the following points:

- To help reduce the exposures of workplace injuries and illnesses.
- To help ensure compliance with federal and state standards.
- To promote and maintain the interest of health and safety issues with all employees.
- To educate managers, supervisors and employees by awareness and training activities that are primarily responsible for the prevention of incidents.
- To make health and safety activities an integral part of all the operating procedures and safety programs.
- To provide discussion on loss exposures and possible solutions.
- To inform and educate employees, supervisors and senior management about health and safety issues, new standards, research findings, loss trending, etc.

## **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 departmental or system wide safety audits.
- Develop and facilitate safety training.
- Investigate incidents to identify root cause.
- Communicate safety issues to employees and management.

Once the committee's role is defined, it should be determined who will serve on the committee. Ideally the committee should be an equal mix of employees and management representatives. Members selected to serve of the committee should:

- Have contact with operations, areas of high risk or with large numbers of employees.
- Have genuine interest and concern with workplace safety.
- Have good communication skills.
- If possible, have safety and health knowledge or experience.
  - Provide training if they do not have this 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. 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.

For small memberships, a monthly or (at minimum) quarterly safety meeting involving department heads could be conducted. At these meetings safety issues and concerns, recent incidents (including “near misses”) and injuries should be reviewed and discussed. This can work if meetings are held on a regular basis and employee input is encouraged and solicited.

When the committee’s role and initial goals are established, let everyone know and ask for input. When the committee is about to start, post the names of the committee members and let everyone know how they can participate.

## **Empowering the Safety Committee**

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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, incident investigation, or investigations of complaints.
- Review and comment on plans for acquisition or purchase of new equipment.
- Make recommendations to management regarding plans that would rectify hazards.
- Should have a budget of its own.

## **Operating the Committee:**

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

## **Conducting Safety Committee Meetings:**

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An agenda should be drafted and distributed to participants before a meeting. Posting the 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 to everyone in the memberships.

The secretary should format minutes to reflect the agenda and include.

- Attendee names.
- Incidents reported and reviews done since last meeting.
- Completed and uncompleted recommendations.
- Summary of safety audits, policy reviews, etc.
- Safety training activities (pending and completed).
- Review applications for submittal for The Ed MacDonald Safety Enchantment Grant and Scholarship. (for MMA workers compensation members only)
- Summary of outstanding items for discussion at the next meeting.

## **Periodic Review**

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Operation of the Safety Committee should be reviewed annually. The original mission statement should be reviewed along with goals and objectives, accomplishments and challenges remaining. This is an opportunity to review operation of the committee and adjust. At the six-month point, review the committee's responsibilities, management support, workforce involvement and make any adjustments as needed.

At the end of the first year, review the committee's results. Review the OSHA 300 logs. Are reported incidents increasing or declining? Were there any severe incidents? Was appropriate incident investigation done for each event and root cause identified? It is possible reported injuries and hazards will 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.

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**

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- No mission statement or no clearly defined role for the committee's existence.
- Talk, but no decisions and no action.
- Meetings are not intended to be gripe sessions.
- No plan, no schedule, no agenda.
- One voice dominates all discussion, other members are discouraged from participating or providing input.
- No minutes are taken.
- Never rotating the members or officers.

## **Safety Committee Planning Guide**

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### **A. Initial Organization of Safety Committee**

1. Management, selectmen, 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.
2. The Safety Committee should have the full backing of management if they are to function effectively.
3. Safety Committees should have communication with senior management through direct reporting or via distribution of the minutes.

## **B. Typical Duties of a Committee**

1. Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of the Safety Committee.
2. Investigate and review injuries as soon as possible to determine root cause and prevent recurrence.
3. Review incidents, near misses, incident investigation reports, claim summaries and loss trending on a periodic basis.
4. Perform periodic safety inspections and audits, report unsafe conditions and suggest corrective actions to senior management.
5. Develop, implement and review written safety programs, procedures and checklists.
6. Direct involvement with membership wide training.
7. Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvements in safety.
8. Publicly acknowledge and recognize accomplishments.

## **C. Setting of Goals**

1. Goals should be measurable and achievable.
2. Goals should be designated as short term and long term.
3. Goals should be reviewed periodically to determine the effectiveness of the committee.

## **D. Safety Committee Meeting Agenda**

Committee chair 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:

### *1. Call to Order*

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

## *2. Old Business*

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

## *3. Incident Review*

- Brief summary of number and type of incidents reported since last meeting.
- Discuss severe or potentially severe cases including action to be taken.
- Brief summary of number and type of incidents for the year to date.
- Evaluate effectiveness of incident investigation. Are incident investigations properly done and root cause identified?

## *4. 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 taken as a result of inspections.

## *5. 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).
- Review advance level training for committee members.

This information is intended to assist you in your loss control efforts. "Best Practices" are developed from available current information but may not address every possible cause of loss. We do not assume responsibility for the elimination of all hazards that could possibly cause accidents or losses. Adherence to these recommendations does not guarantee the fulfillment of your obligation under local, state, or federal laws.



## References

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The Maine Department of Labor-**SafetyWorks!**

[http://www.safetyworksmaine.com/safe\\_workplace/safety\\_management/index.html](http://www.safetyworksmaine.com/safe_workplace/safety_management/index.html)

The Ed MacDonald Safety Enhancement Grant and The Ed MacDonald Scholarship Grant

<https://memun.org/Insurance-Services/Risk-Management-Services/Grants-Scholarships>

MMA Online University

<https://firstnetcampus.com/MMA2/entities/MMA/logon.htm>

