

# Health & Safety Committees



## What is the purpose of a Health and Safety Committee?

A health and safety committee can be an important way to improve conditions on the job. The committee provides a forum for employees and management to work together to solve health and safety problems. An effective committee can help prevent injury and illness on the job; increase awareness of health and safety issues among workers, supervisors, and managers; and develop strategies to make the work environment safe and healthy.

Because health and safety must be a shared interest of management and workers, most committees are made up of workers and management, but there is no reason why union workers cannot have a committee without management. The key is to have a working group that is actively engaged in improving conditions at work to prevent accidents and reduce health hazards.

Typically this will result in an improved quality of work life and a positive atmosphere for production.

## How to Start a Committee

- Request that the company establish a joint committee to improve health and safety at the workplace. If the company is not agreeable, set up a union committee. Or if a separate committee is not feasible, set aside time on the agenda at each union meeting for members to discuss health and safety concerns.
- Negotiate language in your collective bargaining agreement to establish a health and safety committee.

While CBA language may include additional terms, basic CBA language could be:

*There shall be a Joint Health and Safety Committee consisting of equal representation from the company and the union. A minimum of three (3) committee members shall be appointed by the company from among its employees and a minimum of three (3) committee members shall be appointed by the Union from among its members. Union members of the Committee will be paid for time spent carrying out the duties of the committee.*

It is important that both labor and management select their own representatives. Also, committee meeting time, and the necessary pre-meeting and post-meeting follow up work, should be covered as regular work time.

## What can a Committee do?

Health and Safety Committees can be involved in a number of areas. Duties commonly include:

- Talking to workers to better understand their concerns and issues around hazardous and unsafe conditions.
- Conducting regular inspections or safety audits of the workplace to identify health and safety problems. These inspections are usually conducted shortly before the committee meeting. Problems identified can be discussed at the meetings. Resolution of the problems should be monitored at subsequent committee meetings.



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- Investigating accidents and near-misses. The objective should be to determine the root causes that led to the incident so that these factors can be addressed and future accidents can be prevented.
- Identifying and collecting written and audiovisual health and safety resources about common hazards at the facility, as well as increasing workers' access to internet-based resources.
- Encouraging expanded health and safety training sessions at the facility.
- Being involved in the planning process for workplace changes (ex. new equipment, new manufacturing processes) to determine any potential effects on workers' health and safety.
- Establish a regular day and time to meet. Meetings should be canceled only in case of emergencies. Frequent cancellation of meetings is a primary reason why some health and safety committees fail.

## How Can Committee Meetings Be More Productive?

- Have a set agenda which members receive at least a day before the meeting.
- Try to keep discussion specific to the agenda items. Avoid meetings becoming general gripe sessions.
- Establish a system for recording meeting minutes or notes. Distribute them at least a day before the next meeting.

## Committee Organization

- Joint committees should seek equal numbers of representatives from labor and management. The chairing of meetings should be rotated between the two groups.
- The committee should include representatives from as many departments as possible (participation from the maintenance department is especially important). Explore ways to include participation of the evening shift workers since committees almost always meet during the day.

## The Union Health and Safety Committee

Whether there is a joint health and safety committee or not there are several advantages to having a union health and safety committee. These can include:

- More open discussion of health and safety concerns.
- Development of training programs and independent research on hazards.
- Assistance in preparation of grievances related to health and safety.
- Development of potential health and safety contract language.

**If you would like more information on how to ensure your workplace Health and Safety Committee is effective, please reach out to your local union rep or call (212) 684-5300.**



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