

A Snapshot in Safety and Risk

Implementing an Effective Safety Committee

Safety committees can play an integral role in the operational structure of an organization or department by ensuring employees know how to recognize hazards and the basic principles for controlling them. However, simply creating a safety committee isn't enough. Less effective safety committees often lack goals and direction, which leads to poor safety results. If your organization is headed in the wrong direction, there's time to turn it around by refocusing your effort.

Measuring Success



If implemented correctly, a safety committee can be a valuable tool and positively impact each department or operation. There are five factors that will influence the success:

1. **Clear direction.** Define the mission of your committee. It should be concise and stated in one to three sentences.
2. **Common Goals.** These drive the committee's success and should align with the direction and purpose of specified deadlines.
3. **Defined Roles.** There are three primary roles: chairperson, secretary, and members. Expectations should be written for each role.
4. **Accountability.** Holding everyone accountable for their role in improving the workplace safety and health program ensures responsibility. Meeting minutes should be taken, and action items should be assigned with due dates.
5. **Representation.** A balance of management, hourly and salaried employees, and stakeholders from different departments is essential.
 - a. Keep the total below 15. Too many representatives and accountability may be tossed by the wayside. Too few and the burden of the committee will often fall on 1 or 2 people.
 - b. Consider rotating members every 2 to 3 years or when one or more members are not productively engaged in the committee. Participation in the safety committee can also assist your organization develop leaders.

Failure to follow the above criteria often results in lackluster or non-productive safety committees. When management observes sub-par efforts, they tend to avoid "volunteering" their top performers.

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Establish Goals and Objectives

Measuring success means having written goals and objectives. It's important to quantify and qualify each goal with the end date clearly stated. For example, "Provide accident investigation training to all supervisors by the end of the third quarter." The committee may then determine how they'll achieve these goals. Keep the acronym SMART (**Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, and Timely**) in mind when you set goals and objectives. Goals should meet these standards to be effective and may periodically need to be updated. The last item to consider regarding goals is to make sure that upper management agrees with them, and that they are communicated across the entire organization.

What is Not Part of the Safety Committee

Safety committees aren't complaint departments. Safety committees frequently become ineffective if operational complaints become a common part of meetings. In most cases, there's an existing process better equipped to handle employee complaints. Safety committees need to stay focused on their task and follow their goals and objectives. Whenever possible, shut down non-safety related agenda items quickly. Non-safety complaints need to be addressed to the proper management channels.

Do You Have Volunteers?

- It's important to have representatives from all departments on the committee.
- Committees made up of a combination of management and frontline help move committee suggestions along the way.
- Management representatives can help frontline employees understand what needs to happen to make change; change isn't going to happen overnight.



When you have employees interested in being involved, make them part of the team. When you rotate committee representatives, you risk losing dedicated employees and cheerleaders in the process. While we want all employees to share in the experience for the educational aspect, some will be more dedicated than others. If your program requires switching out team members, consider revisiting this to see if it makes sense for your operation. Keep the dedicated employees who want and will be of service not only to the committee but the organization.

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Communication Can Equal Results



Communication is key to the success and effectiveness of the safety committee. When frontline employees see their suggestions make a difference, or make something safer, it goes a long way toward getting team members to buy into the safety culture. Frontline employees want to know they have a voice, once they see it, they will likely continue to be part of the safety culture and a cheerleader to other frontline employees.

Standouts will Standup

Often something as simple as employee recognition helps to bridge team members' success and commitment to the organization.

What can the safety committee offer to identify individual team members?

- Lapel pins, placed on their identification card.
- Special handwritten notes of thanks for their outstanding contribution.
- Recognition during a meeting, thanking the employee for their efforts in making a difference.



If an employee knows they stand out, they're more likely to take pride in their commitment. Exploring ideas to instill identity and pride in committee members is an opportunity for success and effectiveness of them wanting to be a team leader.

If you feel your safety committee isn't as effective as it should be, it might be time to revisit its structure and see if changing its direction helps the committee stay the course. Sometimes it's easier to find out why things are not working, rather than shutting down the committee without trying to evaluate the committee and see what is not working, and how can it be changed so the committee is effective.