Safety Recognition Program – Guide for Creating a Safety Committee

This guide has been designed to help you create a basic voluntary safety committee for your company and outline the roles and responsibilities for the committee. The guide covers general information on how to assemble a committee, functions of a safety committee, suggested committee objectives, and the associated records to develop and maintain. If there are any regulatory requirements which dictate the need for a safety committee, you should follow those requirements as your initial guide and incorporate any helpful suggestions provided within this guide as applicable.

What is a Safety Committee?
A safety committee is a working group that is made up of employee and management representatives who, together, address a multitude of safety topics at a company. Overall, safety committees are responsible for developing and reviewing safety programs and policies as well as being the vehicle for all employees to ask questions, express ideas and learn about safety at their workplace.

The Purpose of the Safety Committee
Your safety committee should actively promote and encourage employee participation in the safety programs at your company.

An effective safety committee can also help with compliance efficiency, improving safety conditions, and the reduction of risks associated with workplace injuries and illnesses.

A safety committee should bring together the necessary, goals, information and instructions between employees and management by utilizing the experience and skills of the committee members.

Safety committees are proactive by keeping safety awareness, issues and solutions in the forefront rather than waiting for an incident to happen and becoming reactive. They also promote better teamwork and better implementation of safety programs.

Beginning Steps
The most important step is to get management involvement and support. This effort is important to not only fund and allow time for the committee to operate but to show this effort is important and is a serious priority. Management will also be needed to provide oversight and ensure that the committee is meeting its objectives.

Members of management should be included within the make-up of the committee itself, but at a minimum they should grant the necessary authority to the committee and review committee meeting minutes.

Next steps involve the planning and organizing the initial committee members and outlining the overall goals and objectives. The elements of assembling committee members are discussed below.

For setting goals and objectives, at least for your first few meetings, it’s ok to begin with simple, easily attainable goals or projects. One suggestion is to begin with collecting ideas and issues that may have been discussed with management or have been known safety issues.

Once your committee is assembled and you have a basics plan, you should have management officially announce that a safety committee has been formed and introduce the committee members and committee’s initial objectives or goals.
Who Should Serve on the Committee?
Safety committees typically consist of staff employees and management. Ideally there should be equal numbers of each however, the ratio of each is not as important as having at least one of each group. The size of the committee is totally up to your company needs and available staff.

Determine ahead of time if you want to maintain a voluntary basis for the committee or if you want to assign people as part of their regular job duties. Experience has shown that volunteer basis committees have the most positive engagement and support.

It’s recommended there be at least one representative for each department of the company. Keep in mind that one committee member can represent more than one department. Pay attention to employees that may wish to serve but are working on different shifts. Special arrangements may be necessary. Also, over time, the size and make-up of the committee can be modified to address your company needs.

It is also important in the beginning to keep the committee structure simple so that it’s easy to manage and facilitate. This can be accomplished by starting with a chairperson and general members.

The Committee Chairperson
A safety committee needs to have a leader and that is the role of the committee chairperson. This person should have the necessary skills to guide the committee and act as a liaison to management when needed. The key skills of the chairperson should include organization, commitment, a working knowledge of the company and departments as well as an understanding of the applicable safety compliance requirements.

Other helpful traits for the chairperson would be enthusiasm for the company’s safety program and good communication skills for not only working with the other committee members, but to inform other employees on the activities of the safety committee.

Depending again on the size and functions of the committee, it is recommended that a co–chair also be assigned in case of the primary chair person being absent.

The following are typical duties of the committee chairperson and/or co-chairperson:

- Setting safety goals and projects
- Develop the committee agenda
- Schedule the committee meetings date, time and location
- Notify members of meeting times and location
- Facilitate the meetings (see Suggestions for Holding a Meeting below)
- Record, maintain and archive minutes
- Define the roles and responsibilities of committee members
- Assign applicable responsibilities and deadlines for any action items
- Distribute minutes to members, employees and management
- Serve as liaison between management and the committee
Committee Members
Again, your committee should include both staff employees and management. The general committee members will have the responsibilities to follow through with the action items and projects assigned by the chairperson.

The following are typical duties of the general committee members:
- Attend all safety committee meetings
- Contribute to the committee meetings and projects
- Respond to and discuss safety issues raised by other employees
- Gather employee input regarding safety issues
- Encourage and promote the company’s safety programs and policies
- Report any safety hazards
- Make recommendations for corrections
- Assist in the development of safety programs, procedures, and policies
- Assist in the training of employees on safety programs, procedures, and policies
- Participate or perform periodic facility inspections
- Participate or perform accident investigations
- Collect safety information as necessary
- Maintain appropriate safety records as assigned

How long should they serve
There is no minimum or maximum term that needs to be met for a voluntary safety committee.

To maintain consistency to the safety committee, you may choose not to set a term limit, but if you are interested in getting more employees involved you may want to consider rotating members to allow other employees the opportunity to serve. Rotating committee members and chairpersons, can prevent meeting fatigue and maintain fresh input.

The longer your committee members serve on a committee, the more experienced they become. Keep this in mind if you do not want to lose experienced members. On the other hand, it’s important to watch for members that become complacent and are no longer effective.

How Often Should the Safety Committee Meet?
There is no specific number of times a safety committee needs to meet. This will depend on the level of activities and the company need. However, it is recommended that the committee should meet at least once each month. Initially you may find it helpful for the committee to meet more often in order to better establish goals and get everyone used to working on the committee.

Productive committee meetings are those that have a well planned agenda and last no more than an hour. This time frame helps keep members to the agenda and minimizes the amount of time the employees are away from the other job responsibilities.

Being consistent with schedules and times is important for attendance and participation, but remember that committee meetings can certainly be scheduled more often, less often or held for longer or shorter time periods as needed.
Suggestions for Holding a Meeting
Productive and successful committee meetings should start and stop on time. To accomplish this, the chairperson should keep to the agenda and ensure that discussions don’t get off track.

For the first committee meeting, the following specific items should be covered:

- Welcome members to the committee
- Set the committee meetings schedule and confirm that the time and dates are convenient for all members
- Identify the different roles and committee positions as applicable

The following are other suggestions common for all committee meetings:

- Determine the need for any work to be performed outside of the committees meetings
- Help committee members to work through issues raised and strive to get a consensus on solutions
- Write detailed notes and minutes that cover questions, issues, and recommendations raised during the meetings
- The chairperson should ensure that all committee members have an equal opportunity to share ideas and suggestions
- Schedule the next meeting(s), arrange times, dates, and place

Committee Objectives and Goals
Beyond the on-going compliance monitoring a company should do, what a safety committee should take on will depend on several factors including the needs of the company, the compliance condition of the overall safety program and the capabilities of the committee.

Some companies find their objectives and goals through employee inputs or as a result of conducting safety reviews of their facility. The goals can be either short term or long term but should be in-line with the capabilities of the committee and support of management. The following are some suggested goals to consider as a beginning point for the committee:

- On-going compliance monitoring
- Reduction initiatives of workplace hazards
- Employee safety training
- Development of regulatory programs
- Safety award programs
- Periodic facility reviews
- Employee engagement
- Driver safety
Committee Documentation

The Agenda
The agenda keeps the meeting organized and needs to be well prepared in advance of the meeting. It shouldn’t be too lengthy or over ambitious.

Depending on the level of activities of the committee, a typical agenda should include the following:

- Date, time and location of the meeting
- Roll call of members present
- Highlights (or minutes) of the last meeting
- Review of any outstanding issues
- Review status of current goals/objectives
- Discuss any safety issues or incidents
- Discuss company inspection reviews
- Raise any new business
- Reviews of goals and objectives
- Setting or modifying deadlines for goals or objectives
- Next meeting date, time and location

The Minutes
Minutes are the written record of the meetings discussion as well as a record of the status of safety compliance within the company. The chairperson can either prepare the minutes themselves or assign a general member to take minutes.

Whoever is responsible for taking minutes should be clear and complete in preparing the minutes and ensure they capture all relevant points that are raised during the meeting. Only those elements that are associated with the agenda and new business related to the company’s safety program should be focused on.

A generic form to prepare minutes is provided at the end of this guide.

Tips for an Effective Safety Committee

- Stay Transparent!
- Keep management involved and informed
- Hold regular meetings and follow a consistent schedule as much as possible
- Prepare clear and manageable agendas ahead of each meeting
- Keep clear and complete minutes of each committee meeting
- Assign follow-ups for each action item
- Distribute committee minutes to each committee member and all company employees
- Communicate projects and accomplishments of the safety committee to everyone
- Recognize positive contributions by the safety committee
- Periodically review the committee’s progress and effectiveness
Common Failures of Safety Committees

- There is no interest or support by management
- The committee does not have clear direction or function
- The committee meetings do not operate with structure resulting in no action items
- The committee does not prepare regular agendas or meeting schedule
- Members are not held accountable for showing up to meetings
- Agendas and minutes are not shared with management or other employees