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Risk Control Best Practices: A Guide to Safety Committees for Public Entities

An effective committee brings management and non-management staff together in an effort to achieve the common goal of a safe workforce. They are a key component to any accident prevention plan. It is this coordinated effort that provides the key to organizational change. Experience shows that employees are likely to accept and embrace change when they are included in the decision-making process.

Effective safety or risk management committees have many functions in a public entity:

- To provide a forum to discuss cross-departmental safety concerns and share ideas that may not otherwise occur due to the structure of local government.
- To help identify, evaluate, and mitigate risks in the workplace for all departments and levels of employees.
- To assist in reducing the frequency and severity (cost) of incidents, as well as all associated costs.
- To capitalize on the training and experience that each department may have to help resolve concerns.
- To serve as a link between management and employees on safety topics that affect the entity's operations and staff.
- To gain employee support by including all levels of staff in the decision-making process.
- To provide an open communication channel to employees for suggesting new safety ideas.
- To eliminate unsafe behavior and situations at all levels throughout the organization and to strive to create an accident-free environment.
- To provide management an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to risk management and employee safety by enabling them with resources and support as needed.

Establishing a Safety Committee

For a committee to be successful, it must have the following elements well-defined in order to build a strong foundation for the committee's activities:

1. Well-defined duties
2. Active membership
3. Meeting procedures
4. Goals and objectives
5. Leadership support
6. Evaluation

***Note:** In this guide we will be using the term Safety Committees, however, some organizations prefer the term Risk Management Committee which has a broader focus than employee and public safety and looks into other areas of risk, or an Accident Review Committee which has the authority to determine if an accident was preventable or not and in some cases recommend discipline. No matter the name of your committee, it should be one that looks at all issues, employee safety, public safety, and how to prevent injuries or potential liability scenarios.*

Also, be aware that some States have regulations regarding the organization, membership, and responsibilities of a Safety Committee.



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1. WELL DEFINED DUTIES

A Safety Committee can perform a variety of activities. These activities should focus on the prevention of accidents but should not be limited to employee and public safety. The committee should also embrace other potential areas of loss, such as auto accidents, property damage, environmental protection, general liability, etc. Committees that are able to achieve visible results are likely to gain the support of the entire organization and become more engaged. Depending on the entity's organization, the Safety Committee can assume a combination of the following responsibilities:

- **Accident Investigations** - Review accidents and/or near misses to determine root causes and eliminate the chance of recurrence.
- **Self-Audits** - Conduct inspections of the property buildings and facilities and assist in developing action plans to reduce hazards.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** - Track the results of corrective actions and determine the effectiveness of committee activities.
- **Employee Training** - Identify and coordinate safety training needs within the organization.
- **Analyze Trends** - Review past accidents, identify any recurrence of different types of accidents, and then determine prevention plans.
- **Increase Safety Awareness** - Discuss and develop methods for increasing safety awareness (e.g., posters, pamphlets, information distributed with paychecks, departmental meetings, incentive programs, and name recognition).
- **Research** - Seek out grant funding, research, and evaluation of new technology or equipment that will help make a particular job function more safe.

In establishing a committee, senior management should clearly outline the related objectives and responsibilities. Once these activities are performed, a method of reporting and tracking should be developed to evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of the committee's activities to the organization. Examples of this are the meeting minutes and action plans.

2. ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

The appropriate selection of members is a critical function in establishing a successful Safety Committee. Members should be truly interested in the welfare of their co-workers and have an understanding of safety and risk principles. It is important for all levels of the organization to be represented, both management and non-management alike. This could be a department head, training officer, or laborer, as long as they are prepared to have an open mind to discuss issues and are eager to help your organization reduce its risk.

Size of the Safety Committee

Committee membership will vary with the size of the organization. Ideally, committee membership is representative of all departments and shifts within the entity. The group should be small enough to function smoothly but large enough to foster communication between work groups. For very small entities, as few as 2 or 3 people could make up the committee, but larger entities require more involvement. Most committees function best with no more than 10 to 12 members; however, very large or multi-site operations may establish smaller groups that report to one central committee. If the committees are split, the chairpersons of each should meet regularly to review their activities.

Distribution of membership

Employee representation should be at least equal to management representation. This distribution will help to promote the open exchange of ideas and opinions by assuring members that employees have a prominent voice in the forum. From time to time, additional employees may be asked to attend meetings to present information or views on safety problems, issues, and solutions.



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Selecting a Chairperson

Most committees are chaired by a member of senior management. However, due to the need for employee involvement, many entities may assign co-chairpersons. The co-chairperson could be a non-management representative who shares the responsibility of overseeing the Safety Committee's activities. The Risk Manager can and should be present to guide and support the group, but should not be the Committee Chair.

Selecting members

Employee members should be enlisted through a volunteer process or through election by co-workers. This will help ensure that members are interested in achieving results and are dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe workplace. A Safety Committee member should have the following qualities:

- Interest in safety issues.
- Being receptive to new ideas.
- Familiarity with processes and procedures.
- Ability to express their thoughts and ideas.
- Willingness to participate in projects and meetings.
- A high level of respect among peers.

The members should be rotated periodically to assist in promoting fresh ideas and maximizing the scope of involvement. The rotation should be staggered to maintain continuity of the committee so that complete turnover of the committee does **not occur at the same time**.

3. MEETING PROCEDURES

For a safety committee to be successful, it should be taken as seriously as other committees within your entity. Meetings should allow for time for members to bring up concerns and to follow up on outstanding corrective action items. They should have set meeting times, agendas, meeting minutes, and standard meeting formalities.

Determine the meeting schedule

Meetings of the Safety Committee should be held on a regular basis. Monthly meetings are ideal for most entities. Meetings should be held quarterly at a minimum. (Some states have specific requirements regarding the meeting schedule of Safety Committees. It is important to understand the specific guidelines for your area.) The meeting dates should be predetermined and be communicated to all committee members. Additional meetings can be scheduled for special problems or for emergency situations.

Set timelines

Time limits should be placed on the meetings. These limits will assist the chairperson(s) in keeping the meeting focused. Newly created committees may need a little more time than normal for their first few meetings. Once the members have become comfortable with their roles, however, the length of meetings will fall in line with pre-determined schedules. Specific timelines should be set for the completion of projects and action items.

Appoint a Secretary to take meeting minutes

A key component to an effective committee is the follow-up on action items that are identified during a meeting. The tracking of this process can make or break a committee. A committee member should be designated to record the minutes of the meeting and any corrective actions needed. The minutes should then be typed and be distributed to all committee members as soon as possible after each meeting. (It is a good idea to rotate this responsibility among committee members, if possible.) See "Sample Safety Committee Meeting Minutes" and "Sample Action Plan" below.



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Prepare an agenda

The committee chairperson should prepare an agenda for each meeting to provide structure for the committee's discussions. This established agenda should be followed closely so that the chairperson(s) can maintain control of the meeting and increase the productivity of the group during each session. The agenda should include the following:

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting should begin promptly at the specified time.
2. **Roll Call:** Record names of those present. Those who are unable to attend should notify the secretary in advance.
3. **Introductions:** Introduce any guests to the committee.
4. **Review Minutes:** Review the minutes from the last meeting and follow up on any old business.
5. **New Business:** Any new safety-related issues should be discussed at this point. Anyone wishing to raise an issue should contact the chairperson in advance so that it can be placed on the agenda. For example, if an employee notices a recurring unsafe act or condition, they may recommend that the committee investigate the exposure. A manager might recommend the initiation of a safety orientation program for all new hires. These ideas become topics for discussion. The committee then develops a plan of action for each.
6. **Review of Action Plan Items and Safety Committee Functions:** This portion may depend on the extent of the committee's responsibilities. The committee may review recent accident investigations and reports of near misses to determine root causes, conduct inspections of the facility, evaluate recent training activities, and determine action plans to reduce hazards. These action plans should include a focus on continually increasing safety awareness.
7. **Education:** Identify areas where specific training is needed. This may mean for the committee to enhance its ability to achieve objectives for specific work groups or to address trends/recurrences for the entire workforce. Outside speakers can present on topics such as Accident Investigation to educate the committee in specific areas of safety. Determine the tools that are necessary to educate the staff and offer recommendations for training programs.
8. **Adjournment:** The meeting should close with a clear understanding of each member's responsibilities and action items for completion prior to the next meeting. Your Agenda can be made as detailed or as simple as the committee wishes.

See sample "Safety Committee Meeting Agenda" below.

Subcommittees

In many instances, a committee may identify issues that need more focused attention. The committee may discover accident trends in the workplace, a recurrence of certain types of vehicle accidents, or a rash of claims being made against the entity for slips/trips/falls. It is also possible that a problem exists that only affects a small specific part of the operation. In this case, the committee may choose to elect a subcommittee or task force to focus the particular problem at hand. The subcommittee should meet separately and should report its findings and recommendations on a regular basis.

Communication

One of the primary functions of a Safety Committee is to promote communication on safety issues to the entire organization. A summary of the minutes of each committee meeting should be posted on your entity's intranet or be sent through email to all staff to inform all employees of the progress of the committee and on its safety goals. It is essential to promote the activities of the committee through periodic postings in public venues such as internal newsletters, your website, board meetings, etc., in order to maintain employee enthusiasm for the program. By conveying the results of the committee's activities and future objectives, the committee can earn entity-wide support for its efforts.

Training

The committee may be assigned a wide variety of responsibilities, so it is critical that the members are provided with the necessary tools to achieve their objectives. Occasionally, the committee may need additional training or direction on certain topics (such as accident investigation or inspections) in order to be efficient in its work.

The committee may also identify areas in which training is needed for specific work groups or for the whole staff. Outside speakers or experts can assist by training employees on these topics. There are also many sources for written safety materials that can be ordered inexpensively or even free of charge. Some entities choose to build a library of these types of safety materials to help with the ongoing objective of maintaining a safe environment.



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4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Each committee should begin by establishing goals for a specified period of time. The goals should be measurable and have a direct impact on the safety of the employees. Committee objectives should be communicated to the workforce to encourage employee participation in achieving safety goals. Completion of the committee's goals and objectives can provide numerous benefits:

- Reduction in unsafe behaviors.
- Fewer accident and lowered costs.
- Increased safety awareness among employees.
- Increased management support for committee activities.
- Motivation for committee members to "keep up the good work".
- Increased committee involvement in safety issues throughout the organization.

5. LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

A Safety Committee is a representation of the entire workforce. By promoting employee involvement, an organization can delegate many duties to the committee. However, the functions of the committee should not replace management's responsibility to participate in the process of creating and maintaining a safe workplace. A Safety Committee, as with any other operation, cannot successfully function without the full, visible support of management, particularly top management.

The overall mission of the Safety Committee must be established by senior management and be communicated to the entire workforce. Parameters should be set regarding the committee's involvement in non-safety matters. The group should remain focused on the topics at hand and not diverge into other workplace issues. The discussions should be positive and maintain the goal of the prevention of workplace injuries.

Management participation and commitment are the keys to the program's success. Nothing provides incentive to an employee like recognition by management for a job well done. Some of the ways that management can show commitment to the mission of the Safety Committee are:

- Allocating funds for safety committee activities.
- Recognition such as awards, certificates, public thanks, and other incentives.
- Distributing a signed safety commitment statement to the entire workforce.
- Participating in Safety Committee activities and projects.
- Performing periodic unannounced safety inspections of the facility on all shifts.
- Requiring all visitors to the facility to adhere to the entity's safety standards.
- Talking to employees about safety, pointing out unsafe behaviors, asking questions, and encouraging responses throughout the organization.
- Acting on employee recommendations.
- Reporting on Safety Committee activities at department head meetings or board meetings.



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6. EVALUATION

Once the Safety Committee has been operational for several months, the members should evaluate their structure and procedures. Self-audits can be used to determine the effectiveness of meetings, members, subcommittees and leadership. These audits will identify areas where improvements can be made to enhance the committee's contribution to the entity and its employees. The end of this document includes some questions the committee should consider when evaluating their operations. (See "Safety Committee Self-Evaluation" form below.)

- Are projects and action plans being completed on time?
- Are the committee's recommendations being implemented?
- Has there been a reduction in incidents due to committee activities?
- Are messages being communicated to the entire workforce?
- Is there an increased level of awareness throughout the organization?
- Are all committee members participating in the process?
- Is there a general acceptance of the committee's activities among employees?
- Has the committee received the appropriate management support?

SUMMARY

The true objective of the Safety Committee is to eliminate unsafe behavior at all levels throughout the organization and strive to create an accident-free workplace and community. The success of the committee depends upon the understanding and participation of employees in the recommendations made by the group. Communication is key and should always be a two-way street. Include the entire staff in the process by keeping them informed and by consistently encouraging input. When management and staff work together toward a common goal the results can be impressive. With accident prevention as the main objective, everyone can see the benefits of committee activities.

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SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Absent: _____

Meeting Topics

Agenda Item

Presented By:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.



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SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Meeting Date: _____ Meeting Start Time: _____

In attendance: _____

Guests in Attendance: _____

Minutes of previous meeting read: No: ____ Yes: ____ Read By: _____

Unfinished Business:

New Business:

Property Inspection Results:

Action Plan Results:

Accident Review (Discuss Vehicle Accidents, Employee Injuries, Claims from the Public, Property-Related Accidents):

Remarks:

Upcoming Events:

Time That Meeting Adjourned:

Date of Next Meeting:



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SAFETY COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION

	No/Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Yes/Always
Support for the committee is given by all levels of management.				
Goals and objectives are clearly understood by all.				
Training is provided to committee members when necessary.				
Management responds to the committee's suggestions.				
Members of the committee are present at all meetings.				
An agenda for the meeting is distributed beforehand.				
The agenda is followed at the meetings.				
The chairperson(s) provide(s) direction and leadership for the meetings.				
Objectives are geared towards reducing accidents; loss runs are used to identify and eliminate trends.				
Sub-committees are established to review specific issues.				
All members are given an opportunity to voice their opinions.				
Meeting time is restricted to established time-frame.				
Members are involved in committee activities outside of the meetings.				
Discussions deal with specific items, not generalities.				
The committee members have a positive attitude towards their responsibilities.				
Management is available for progress meetings with Chairperson(s).				