Joint Health and Safety Committee – Effective and Efficient – Fact Sheet



ARE MEMBERS' DUTIES CLEARLY DEFINED?

The following list of duties is a general list of the types of activities a committee may perform. Actual legal requirements and duties of committees are defined in the OH&S legislation. These requirements vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Always confirm with your jurisdiction for actual requirements. In addition, specific duties may vary with the type and size of the organization, industry, number of safety specialist staff in the organization, the firm's accident experience, and the number of committees present. Common duties may include:

- Attending all committee meetings.
- Promoting the health and safety policy and program.
- Assisting the employer in resolving worker health and safety complaints.
- Providing feedback on workers' suggestions.
- Promoting and monitoring compliance with health and safety regulations.
- Attempting to raise health and safety standards above legal requirements.
- Accompanying a worker during the resolution of work refusals.
- Assisting in the education and training of new workers.
- Participating or making recommendations about the identification and control of workplace hazards.
- Participating in assessments or making recommendations towards the development of control programs for hazardous substances.
- Participating in incident investigations, where required or appropriate.
- Studying safety programs of other companies to enhance own program.
- Conducting health and safety education programs.
- Making health and safety recommendations.
- Carrying out workplace inspections.
- Making recommendations about personal protective equipment.
- Making recommendations regarding monitoring the effectiveness of health and safety program.
- Assisting in the development of organizational health and safety rules.
- Assisting in the development of safe work procedures.
- Initiating other activities as indicated by incident experience.

Is a list of duties available to each member?

When the duties/tasks of health and safety committee members have been specified, they should be produced in written form, posted in the workplace, and a copy issued to each committee member. In this way members can periodically review their duties. This document may be used as a briefing/training guide for new members, and as an information source for all workers.

Do members understand what their duties are?

A list of duties in itself cannot be relied upon to ensure that each committee member understands what is required of him or her. The list of duties should be discussed, either individually or in committee, and each member's understanding ensured.

Do members carry out their duties?

A well structured health and safety committee with a clear-cut purpose, and composed of knowledgeable members who are fully aware of their responsibilities, will still be ineffective if the committee does not carry out its duties. There may be other reasons for lack of committee effectiveness, but if the problem is internal to the committee, it should be within its power to rectify it. Generally, most people are dedicated to safety, but constraints may be imposed by conflicts of interest, personality, or pressure of external priorities. These situations should be resolved as soon as they become evident to enable the committee to concentrate on its prime objective – health and safety.

Is the structure and duties reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?

The structure of the committee and its duties should be periodically reviewed to see that it is appropriately organized to fulfill its role. Review might be necessary when organizational changes or major physical changes have occurred in the workplace. Since a number of minor changes may take place over time, it may be a good idea to review the responsibilities/duties at set intervals.

Do members know the extent of their authority?

Each member must know the scope of his/her authority in dealing with safety matters. The written statement of authority should be reviewed with each committee member, and his/her understanding of it confirmed. Following a revision of duties, a review of the committee's authority should be made to ensure that an appropriate match still exists. Such a review may be necessary when the committee is unable to carry out a specific task due to lack of authority, or when committee members are perceived as regularly exceeding their authority.

Do members exceed their authority?

Members of the health and safety committee may exceed their authority in carrying out their duties, mainly because of the following two reasons:

1) there is something wrong with their stated responsibilities and/or level of authority, or

2) there are no clear set of guidelines to follow.

In both cases, a review of the members' duties is necessary. Where one

individual is found to regularly exceed his authority, the duties should be reviewed with him and his subsequent performance monitored. A procedure for recommending dismissal of individual members might be considered in the terms of reference for the committee.

Are the chairperson's duties and authority clearly specified?

The committee chairperson (co-chairs) must assume extra responsibilities. A decision should be made whether these responsibilities are shared all the time or taken in turn (in some jurisdictions, the method of chairing meetings is legislated).

Specific co-chairperson's duties may include:

- Scheduling meetings, notifying members.
- Preparing an agenda.
- Inviting specialists or resource persons as required.
- Presiding over meeting.
- Guiding meeting as per agenda.
- Ensuring all discussion items end with a positive decision.
- Reviewing and approve the minutes.
- Assigning projects to members.
- Ensuring that the committee carries out its function.

A list of duties describing the chairperson's responsibilities and authority should be available to all members.

Are the secretary's duties clearly specified?

The secretary's additional responsibilities may vary, depending on several factors. Where only a single chairperson has been appointed, the secretary may be required to assume these duties in his/her absence. The secretary's duties may include:

- Keeping pertinent records.
- Reporting on the status of recommendations.
- Preparing the minutes.
- Distributing the minutes after approval.
- Disseminating safety information to members.
- Assisting the chairperson as required.,

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