Joint Health and Safety Committee – Measuring Effectiveness – Fact Sheets



HOW DOES THE COMMITTEE MEASURE ITS EFFECTIVENESS?ing

In order to improve its efforts, a health and safety committee will want to have some measure of its past performance. In this way, weak areas can be strengthened and strong areas maintained. Although an improved health and safety record might be considered the most important measure, the question is not necessarily an easy one to answer. By having clearly defined its purpose and identified specific duties, the committee can audit its work against those parameters.

Do the workers know who members of the committee are?

Health and safety legislation generally requires posting the names of the joint health and safety members. It is always a good practice to do so. If the workers do not know who their committee members are, it is difficult to communicate their occupational health and safety (OH&S) concerns effectively. To meet his/her responsibilities, a committee member must communicate with the workers in his area on health and safety matters. Names can be posted on bulletin boards or through the organization's intranet. In addition, new workers can learn who the committee members are during their health and safety orientation training, and other workers can learn when the committee member reports at union and management meetings.

Are the duties and authority of members known to the workers?

The joint efforts of all workers are necessary to achieve maximum results from any health and safety program. Cooperation is enhanced when everyone understands the ground rules. The duties and authority of committee members should be posted for all to read, and form a part of new employee orientation training.

Is the committee seen by workers as being useful in providing leadership in safety?

If workers see the committee not performing a useful health and safety function, the committee will have trouble in carrying out its' duties effectively. Feedback from workers may decrease, and there may be poor cooperation or even

opposition. On the other hand, committees with a positive image are able to function effectively. Not only must the committee carry out its responsibilities as effectively as possible, but it should also consider how these actions are viewed in the minds of the workers. Too often, committee failures and setbacks quickly become known, while its accomplishments may go relatively unnoticed. Committee members should communicate solutions as well as problems. Both types of discussions raise safety awareness.

Is the committee perceived by management as correctly meeting its responsibilities and authority?

Even though management is represented on the committee, there may be the perception by other managers that their individual responsibility and authority on safety matters have been taken away, resulting in confrontation, or worse still, abandonment of responsibility. Fortunately, the solution to this problem is relatively simple. The committee's responsibility and authority should be clearly defined in writing, be known to all, and be followed by committee members. Managers should recognize that health and safety are legitimate concerns of both labour and management, and committees can play an important role in achieving greater worker participation in this vital issue.

Also recall that the establishment of a committee in no terms removes the responsibility for worker health and safety from the employer. As a representative of the employer, managers and supervisors continue to have legal health and safety responsibilities.

Do line supervisors see members as a barrier to worker/supervisor communication in safety?

In most Canadian jurisdictions, the legally recognized communication channel on safety matters is between the worker and the supervisor. Workers are to report unsafe acts and conditions initially to their immediate supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for acting on such reports and for directing safe work procedures. Committee members should not interfere with this process, except under special circumstances, such as cases of imminent danger where immediate corrective action is necessary. After such direct intervention, the member should advise the supervisor as soon as possible. Of course, there should be no restriction on a committee member discussing safety problems with the supervisor or on the supervisor seeking advice or assistance from the committee.

Do employees perceive the committee as reducing management's responsibility for maintaining a safe workplace?

In some instances, opposition to health and safety committees has stemmed from the belief that these committees reduce or remove management's overall responsibility for safety in the workplace. It must be clearly understood by all concerned that the employer's responsibility for safety is in no way diluted or diverted with the formation of a joint health and safety committee.

Are members perceived as enforcers or advisors?

Individual committee members may alienate the workers they represent if they routinely act as enforcers while carrying out their safety duties. Ensuring compliance with safety regulations and procedures is the supervisor's job while the committee member's role is more that of an observer and advisor.

Do workers make suggestions to committee members?

Effective two-way communication ensures that workers are aware of committee activities and gives them an opportunity to contribute ideas to the committee. When workers regularly make suggestions to committee members, it indicates that the communication channels are open and working the way they should. To maintain this mutual confidence, any worker who raises health or safety matters should be granted the courtesy of a response. When follow-up action is delayed, a report explaining the reasons should be given. Committee members should strive to promote input from workers by providing prompt feedback on all suggestions and ideas.

Does management representation on the committee reflect its strong commitment to safety?

Even with the best efforts of the health and safety committee, any program lacking management /senior management backing is likely to fail. One of the ways in which management can demonstrate its commitment to safety is in its choice of representatives appointed to the committee. A senior manager not only can encourage follow-up on recommendations, but also lends credibility to the committee and its activities. However, she/he should not dominate the committee, but participate as an equal partner.

Does management fully support committee activities by providing comprehensive information, time, facilities, and training?

True management support of committee activities (or lack of it) may be most readily evident in the provision of resources which are necessary for the committee to function effectively. Certain types of support, such as access to pertinent information, may be required under legislation.

Resources which should be made available include:

- Notification of incidents and of occupational disease.
- Information on potentially hazardous materials/processes.
- Reports on health and safety.
- Incident and injury statistics.
- Time to carry out committee duties.
- Safety reference material.
- Necessary monitoring equipment.
- Allocation of space for meetings.
- General and specific health and safety education and training.

In a unionized workplace, what support does the union provide to its members on the joint committee?

Union support of its members on a joint health and safety committee can be evaluated by the way in which members are appointed, the amount of education provided on union health and safety policies, assisting the attendance of members to health and safety seminars, and help given in situations where a problem has occurred in making committee recommendations.

What proportion of members’ time during paid work hours is spent on health and safety activities?

In some jurisdictions, health and safety legislation specifies minimum time to be allowed for committee work. It may be difficult to assess accurately what proportion of a member's time is spent on safety activities, but this ratio can serve as another indication of the importance given to safety in the organization. One end of the scale is where the only time is that devoted to committee meetings, while the other is where the committee members have adequate time to fully complete their duties (e.g., receive and address concerns from workers, identify hazards, cooperate with occupational health and safety inspector/officer, inspections, investigations, maintaining records, etc.).

How many committee recommendations have been implemented?

If this number is small in relation to those not implemented, it may indicate lack of management commitment to safety, unrealistic recommendations by the committee, or both. Any of these conditions lead to an ineffective committee. For its part, the committee should seek feasible solutions to health and safety problems, and present them in comprehensive form.

When a recommendation is not implemented are the full reasons given to the committee?

There may be valid reasons why committee recommendations cannot be implemented either immediately or in the long term. A delay might be encountered when new equipment must be ordered, when construction is involved, or when corporate authorization is needed. In any event, after management has considered the proposal, the reasons for not being able meet the recommendations should be given and together they can explore alternate solutions to the problem. Some jurisdictions require these reasons to be documented in writing, and to be done within a specified period of time (e.g., 30 days). Failure to reply accurately and within the specified time period can lead to misunderstandings and a perception of lack of management commitment to safety.

Is the full record of committee recommendations, their implementation, and reasons for non-implementation available to all workers?

In order to maintain a high degree of safety awareness throughout the workplace, all workers need to be kept informed on all safety problems and their solutions. Comprehensive minutes, personal contact with committee members, and reports at union and management meetings will all help to share this information. Committee successes need to be publicized at least as well as the occasional failures. Record keeping may be specified by your jurisdiction, including the use of specific forms, submitting minutes/forms to the employer, jurisdiction, etc.

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