



# Guidance on **Safety** **& Health** Committees



OSHA HOTLINE: 623-OSHA (6742)  
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## INTRODUCTION

This document is for guidance only.

A safety and health committee is a forum where safety and health problems can be identified and resolved. Safety and Health committees are important forums for employers and employees to consult and work together to identify and resolve problems and contribute to the development of safe systems of work. Everyone in a workplace shares the responsibility for safety and health. Joint safety and health committees are a mechanism for maintaining this co-operative effort.

A safety and health committee provides an opportunity for the employer and employee representatives to meet and decide what should be done to improve safety and health in the workplace. It provides a mechanism for developing policies and procedures, and for discussing issues which have significance for the whole organisation. The committee is not the best vehicle for the resolution of day to day safety and health issues,



which are best handled promptly by those directly involved.

The committee should review work procedures and make recommendations to improve them where necessary. Members should also take active steps to keep themselves informed of the latest safety and health standards in similar workplaces and undertake training where necessary.

Other functions, which may be given to the committee by the employer, are subject to the committee's consent. These could include functions relating to health promotion in the workplace and the operation of employee assistance programmes.

Importantly, the management representatives on the committee should be aware of their responsibility to bring the latest technological and management developments to the attention of the committee to ensure that committee members are fully informed, and trained as required.



## LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

**Sections 25E and 25F of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act Chapter 88:08 require the following:**

**25E** (1) Every employer in consultation with the representatives of his employees shall establish a safety and health committee at an industrial establishment in accordance with this section where:

- (a) There are twenty-five or more persons employed at that establishment; or
- (b) The Chief Inspector on the basis of prescribed criteria, directs the establishment of such a committee at the industrial establishment where fewer than twenty-five persons are employed.

**25F** Every safety and health committee established at a place of work in accordance with his Act shall:

- (a) Keep under review the measures taken to ensure the safety and health of persons at the place of work;
- (b) Investigate any matter at an industrial establishment
  - (i) which a member of the committee or a person employed thereat considers is not safe or is a risk to health; and
  - (ii) which has been brought to the attention of the employer;
- (c) Attempt to resolve any matter referred to in paragraph (b) and, if it is unable to do so, shall request the Chief Inspector to undertake an inspection of the place of work for that purpose;
- (d) Have such other functions as may be prescribed.

## COMPOSITION OF SAFETY AND HEALTH COMMITTEES

### Management Representatives

The direct involvement of senior management on the committee is recommended so that decisions can be readily implemented.

## **Worker Representatives**

It is recommended that at least half of the members of a safety and health committee be representatives of the employees. The employee representatives for the committee should be elected by the employees who work at that workplace. The employee representatives should not be outnumbered by the employer representatives on the committee.

## **Observers and Specialists may attend if invited**

Observer status is frequently granted to individuals with an interest in a particular issue being discussed or to those who can provide specialist advice. However, observers cannot take part in the decision-making processes of the committee.

## **Role of Safety Practitioners**

Safety practitioners can be representatives of management on a Committee, although it is more common for them to be ex-officio members, giving them an advisory role. Safety officers can also be used as a source of information and to undertake research tasks for the committee.



## **There may be more than one safety and health committee**

In large organisations, it may be useful to define work areas so that a number of committees can exist on one site. In such cases a coordinating committee may be established to oversee the operation of individual committees.

An alternative suitable for some organisations that comprise of a number of different operations involves the formation of subcommittees with appropriate representation to deal with specialised areas.

### **ROLE AND FUNCTIONS**

#### **Safety and Health committees should deal with policy issues and not minor issues**

The existence of agreed policies and procedures will assist in ensuring that the committee functions effectively and deals with appropriate matters. Committee members representing the employer and employees should consult and co-operate to initiate, develop, recommend or carry out measures to ensure the safety and health of employees. They should have a sound understanding of the role of the committee in the overall safety programme.

#### **Policy related functions of an occupational safety and health committee**

The functions of a safety and health committee may include:

- Facilitating consultation and co-operation between the employer and employees in initiating, developing and implementing measures designed to ensure the safety and health of employees at the workplace.
- Keeping itself informed as to standards relating to safety and health generally recommended or prevailing in workplaces of a comparable nature.
- Reviewing, and making recommendations to the employer on rules and procedures at the workplace relating to the safety and health of the employees.

- Recommending to the employer, the establishment, maintenance and monitoring of programmes, measures and procedures at the workplace relating to the safety and health of employees.
- Considering and making such recommendations to the employer as the committee sees fit, in respect of any changes to or at the workplace that may reasonably be expected to affect the safety or health of employees.
- Considering such matters that are referred to the committee by an employee representative.
- Performing such other functions as may be prescribed in regulations or given to the committee, with its consent, by the employer.

### Three crucial functions

1. Making recommendations to the employer.
2. Keeping and reviewing information.
3. Dealing with matters referred by employee representatives.





## **Making recommendations to the employer**

Safety and health committees can make recommendations to the employer on a wide range of programmes, measures and procedures, which may include such things as:

- Resolution of relevant issues
- Programmes to set priorities for the reduction or elimination of hazards from the workplace
- Programmes to reduce the number of particular accidents which occur in the workplace, for example, head, eye, ear or back injury
- Procedures for frequency and type of regular inspections of the workplace, or parts of it
- Procedures for timely notification of accidents and dangerous occurrences to management, the employee representative and the employer's safety officer
- Emergency evacuation and fire procedures
- A regular and systematic process for the identification of hazards and reference to the employer for assessment and control of risk
- Developing ways of ensuring all employees are kept informed of the committee's decisions
- Developing a procedure for minutes of meetings to be made available to employees
- Developing procedures for monitoring and surveillance of employees who may be exposed to health risks such as hazardous substances and noise
- Developing systems to ensure safety and health issues are considered during the selection of new plant and equipment
- Planning for important changes in the work environment to ensure safety and health issues are considered and included in the planning of work processes
- Establishing a procedure for the identification of training necessary to be provided to persons at the workplace
- Establishing procedures for ensuring that early attention is given to any safety or health implications of proposed changes

## **Keeping and reviewing information**

Information provided by the employer regarding hazards at the workplace must be kept readily available in an accessible place. Other material gathered by the committee in the course of its work



should also be stored appropriately so that it can be easily retrieved when needed. It is recommended that the committee and the employer agree on the location of the information and who is responsible for its upkeep. Information may include:

- Accident/incident reports (maintaining confidentiality when appropriate)
- Accident statistics for workplaces and similar industries
- Hazard identification and risk assessments
- Audits of safety management systems
- Workplace procedures
- First aid treatment statistics
- Biological and environmental monitoring reports
- External occupational safety and health reports

### **Dealing with matters referred by Employee Representatives**

Employee concerns are tabled at safety and health committee meetings through the employee representatives.

Typical matters referred by the Safety and Health Representatives include:

1. Hazardous conditions
2. Employee concerns about welfare or indoor air quality
3. Requests for clarification on refusal to work procedures
4. Concerns regarding compliance with the OSH Act

The representative will subsequently provide feedback to the employees that they represent on the progress and outcomes of committee meetings



## PROCEDURES AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

### **Ensure committee is seen to be of value**

A safety and health committee should develop its own meeting procedures. The effectiveness of a safety and health committee will depend on a number of factors. Significant among these will be the degree of co-operation the committee is able to develop and the respect with which the employer and employees view the work of the committee. The following activities could considerably assist the committee's work:

- Regular meetings of the committee, as well as provision for special or urgent meetings as required
- Ensuring all employees are informed of the committee and its functions
- Effective publicity of committee decisions and recommendations
- Speedy decisions by management on committee recommendations and, where necessary, prompt action with effective communication to employees
- Facilitating the means by which workers can input into the processes of the committee
- Setting priorities and monitoring results

## Conduct of meetings

The following points are provided to assist safety and health committees establish procedures for the conduct of meetings:

- (i) Who will chair the meeting? If the parties have difficulty in agreeing on a chairperson, the position could be rotated between employer nominees and employee representatives at each meeting or for a specified period.
- (ii) Will there be a quorum? The fixed number of members that must be present to make the meeting valid should be decided. All parties need to be represented and, when setting the quorum, the parties should allow for absences.
- (iii) Who will take the notes or minutes? The proceedings of all meetings should be recorded. This could be done by a committee member or a minute taker provided for this purpose. Typing and photocopying facilities need to be available.
- (iv) Who will issue minutes? A person should be made responsible for this task.
- (v) Who will draw up and issue the agenda? A member of the committee should be made responsible for drawing up the agenda. Adequate notice of items to be discussed should be given to this person to ensure timely distribution of the agenda.
- (vi) How will decisions be made? Committees need to determine whether decisions are to be made by consensus or by a vote.
- (vii) Who will see the minutes? A copy of the minutes should be provided to each member of the committee as soon as possible after the meeting. Copies of the minutes should be displayed or made available by other means for the information of employees. A member of the committee should be responsible for providing the employer with recommendations of the meeting.



## IMPROVING COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS

## Role of chairperson

Meetings put off or cancelled may not be seen as important, therefore, to eliminate these problems the Chairperson needs to ensure:

- all members of the committee understand their role
- adequate notice is given for scheduled meetings
- meeting times and dates are displayed on notice boards so that everyone in the workplace is aware of committee meeting dates
- a reminder (inclusive of agenda) is sent to members of the committee a week before the meeting takes place, this should occur when the agenda is distributed
- the meeting time is suitable to all members of the committee if possible
- member participation and commitment is evaluated and discussed at meetings

**Avoid the committee getting unnecessarily distracted by day-to-day issues. Ensure that:**

- committee members understand their role and functions such as assisting in the development of policies and procedures to ensure the safety and health of employees
- committee members understand the role of the employee representative and the role of the safety and health committee
- the agenda is not crowded with issues that can be solved elsewhere



### **Avoid the same item appearing on the agenda month after month with no outcome**

- Ensure that definite outcomes result from each agenda item and that someone is allocated the responsibility for actioning the item
- Make more effective representations to management if needed
- Make sure those who can resolve the issue are invited to the next meeting, if the outcomes seem beyond the scope of the committee.
- Document the progress of each item and present the information to the employer

### **Recommendations for action should be followed up and implemented. Ensure that:**

- All recommendations and actions required are noted in the minutes
- Display and distribute the minutes so that responsibility for action is understood throughout the workplace
- Management support is provided to implement action in a timely manner with sufficient information and resources being available
- All members of the committee are committed to the agreed objectives

### **Ensure committee has direction and makes decisions**

Membership of the committee should comprise persons with an appropriate level of safety and health competence. There must be a two-way flow of information between the committee and the workforce.

### **Avoid committee running out of time and not completing business**

- Have a manageable agenda that can be worked in the allocated time
- Start meetings promptly
- Set a priority for items, urgent business should come first

- Ensure agenda has been circulated so that members come prepared

### **Avoid committee meetings becoming dominated by particular committee members**

Ensure all committee members are well informed and confident about holding a position on the committee.

Consider allocating time for each member who wants to contribute to the discussion on a particular item.

### **Review the operations of the committee**

After the committee has been operating for some time, it should review and audit its own operations. This should be undertaken by both management and the committee. These are some of the areas that should be reviewed:

- The success or failure of prevention messages
- Procedures to ensure their continued effectiveness
- The effectiveness of the safety and health committee. This should be done at least once a year
- Policies and procedures, responsibilities, training and inspection process if injuries and diseases have not been reduced or eliminated.

It is important to know where and how to change and improve. Statistical comparisons will help to let the committee know if accidents and incidents are being reduced.

## **CONCLUSION**

An effective safety and health committee is an important part of any preventative strategy to reduce loss of time, injury and disease in the workplace. A committee will only function properly if it has a clearly defined role and purpose and is able to monitor its progress.



For further reading:

- A Short Guide for Employers
- A Short Guide for Employees
- A Guide to Risk Assessment
- The Prevention of Occupational Diseases
- Guidance in Preparing a Safety and Health Policy



Duke Place, Level 4 & 5  
50-54 Duke Street, Port of Spain

For further information:

Tel: (868) 299-0300 Fax: (868) 623-5905

OSHA HOTLINE: 623-OSHA (6742)

**[www.osha.gov.tt](http://www.osha.gov.tt)**

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