Developing an effective safety committee

Many safety committees are doomed because they fall into one or more of these 11 mistakes that limit or eradicate the effectiveness of a safety committee. They must be avoided to have an effective result on an organization.

1. No defined purpose
   Establish a clear purpose and define your roles. Management involvement is a must. Employees must see that management is concerned and involved or they will not attach much importance to the group. Purpose ideas can include: Setting goals for employee and visitor safety, hazard recognition and correction, fleet safety, accident investigation report review, property and preventative maintenance, and review of current job/safety training materials. Make employees aware of the need to comply with safety standards that affect your organization like NFPA, OSHA, D.O.T. and ANSI. Let employees know what the committee is doing. This can improve your safety culture company wide.

2. Lack of resources
   Companies must budget time for meetings, training costs, and communication. If treasury or upper management is so tight you cannot get funding, the safety committee is doomed to failure.

3. Committee size
   Group-think seems to work best when the size of the group is about three to seven individuals. Larger than that and the group can become unwieldy and become difficult to gather everyone for a meeting. A safety committee chairperson should oversee each meeting and keep the safety committee on track. It is best to have each department represented. It should not become a gripe session. The meetings should last no longer than 1 hour. Establish term limits from 6 months to 2 years to allow other employees to serve. Allow members to form subcommittees for special assignments.

4. Lack of training
   Determine how much training you need to offer employees who are rotating in every year. Some may need no training while others may need much more. New members need to be brought up to speed and usually don’t understand the group dynamics right away. They may be unaware of past topics. Give them copies of minutes to catch up with the rest of the team. Take advantage of outside vendors who can be used for committee training, (i.e., your PPE vendor, first aid vendor, local fire department, your insurance agency/company, etc.)

5. No written agenda
   Many companies are swamped with meeting demands. Poorly defined goals of the meeting wastes everyone’s time. Set a written agenda for the meeting with one or two items. If needed, review the agenda at the start of the meeting and make changes if needed. Make an announcement section for new awards, procedures, trends. Action items must be assigned to a person or team with a due date. Plan the agenda for the next meeting, but keep it restricted to one or two items. The committee may meet more often in the beginning because there is much to address. It can then taper off to one time per month or quarterly.

6. Lack of accountability/follow-up
   Take formal minutes and review status reports at the end of meetings. Hold people accountable for their assignments. Keep items outstanding until they are fixed or addressed, especially any recommendations to correct hazards or address improvement opportunities found during the accident investigation process.

7. Overbearing personalities
   Ground Rules must be set during the very first meeting by the safety committee chairperson who will lead each meeting. Some employees will have strong opinions or express themselves so forcefully that they silence any dissent or opposing views. Other employees may try to turn every meeting into a complaint session. Disrespectful and belittling comments are inappropriate in any workplace. If a member comes with a complaint, they should also be required to have a recommendation to address the complaint or be asked not to bring it up at all. The safety committee chairperson should keep the meetings on track with what is on the agenda.

8. Communication failures
   If you don’t toot your own horn, no one else is going to do it either. Communicate your successes to both management and your employee workforce. Use your minutes and organization publications. Keep your news positive like the number of hazards corrected, training provided, improvements made, and good safety practices observed. Recognize members joining or leaving the committee.
9. Management Overcontrol
You want management commitment for kick-offs, announcements, etc. You also want to have an open door to communicate your efforts, focus, and ideas with management. What you don’t want is for management to take over the group and drive all agendas and decision making. Managers have the responsibility to oversee and review ideas brought forward by the committee.

10. Lack of employee participation
Get people on the committee who are enthusiastic and motivated. Get all members to buy into making the workplace a safer and healthier place. Their enthusiasm will be contagious and they will impart their knowledge to other employees. Active involvement and enthusiasm most often is a reflection of the enthusiasm and support shown by management. If employees don’t buy in, the committee will shrivel and die.

11. Unable to cope with change
Committee members should always be looking for new ways to do things. They should be able to change and adapt new methods and technologies where it has an economic payback. The main goal of the committee is to bring about changes that improve worker health, safety, quality, and job satisfaction for everyone. The company that cannot adapt to change will suffer.

The information and recommendations contained in this material have been obtained from sources believed to be reliable. However, SECURA accepts no legal responsibility for the accuracy, sufficiency, or completeness of such information. Additional safety and health procedures may be required under particular circumstances.