

# How to develop an effective safety committee

A safety committee is an important tool to have for any organization. A group of dedicated employees within the company that are focused on making the workplace safer can make a big difference for any company.

While forming a safety committee is a great idea, many safety committees fail because they fall into one or more of these 11 mistakes that limit or erase the effectiveness of a safety committee. In order to make the most out of your safety committee, it's important to avoid the following mistakes.

## No defined purpose

The first step for any safety committee is to establish a clear purpose and define your roles. Management involvement is a must. Employees should 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, etc. 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.

## Lack of resources

Companies should budget time for meetings, training costs, and communication.

## 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 unmanageable and it can be 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 and keep the meeting to no longer than an hour long. It's always a good idea to establish term limits from six months to two years to allow other employees to serve on the committee. If you have special assignments, consider allowing members to form subcommittees.

## 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, so it's important to give them copies of past meeting 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.).

## No written agenda

Set a written agenda for the meeting ahead of time with one or two items. If needed, review the agenda at the start of the meeting and make changes if they're necessary. Make an announcement section for new awards, procedures, and trends. If there are action items, be sure to assign them to the appropriate person or team with a clear 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.

## Lack of accountability/follow-up

Take formal minutes and review status reports at the end of meetings. Hold people accountable for their assignments and keep items outstanding until they are fixed or addressed, especially any recommendations to correct hazards or address improvement opportunities.

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## Overbearing personalities

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Ground rules should be set during the very first meeting by the safety committee chairperson who will lead each meeting. 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.

## Communication failures

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Communicate your successes to both management and your employee workforce. 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.

## Management over-control

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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.

## Lack of employee participation

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Get people on the committee who are enthusiastic and motivated. All members involved in your committee should have a common interest of making the workplace a safer and healthier place.

## Difficulty coping with change

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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.