

State of Wisconsin Guidelines for Developing an Effective Health and Safety Committee*

The following guidelines should be considered when establishing Health and Safety Committees in accordance with Executive Order #194.

PURPOSE:

Health and Safety Committees should be established for the following purposes:

1. To increase and maintain the interest of employees in health and safety issues.
2. To convince managers, supervisors and employees through awareness and training activities that they are primarily responsible for the prevention of workplace accidents.
3. To help make health and safety activities an integral part of the organization's operating procedures, culture and programs.
4. To provide an opportunity for the free discussion of health and safety problems and possible solutions.
5. To inform and educate employees and supervisors about health and safety issues, new standards, research findings, etc.
6. To help reduce the risk of workplace injuries and illnesses.
7. To help insure compliance with federal and state health and safety standards.

FUNCTIONS:

In order to accomplish these objectives, the successful Health and Safety Committee should:

1. Develop a written mission statement and charter.
2. Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of officers and general members.
3. Identify and prioritize goals and establish action plans to achieve each goal.
4. Include representation from different levels and areas of the organization.
5. Meet at least quarterly/monthly.

6. Record and disseminate minutes of each meeting, documenting attendance, problems and issues and corrective action proposed and actions taken to address each issue.
7. Make attendance mandatory with the penalty of removal for repeated absences.
8. Develop methods to increase and maintain safety awareness.
9. Organize special sub-committees to address specific issues and projects.
10. Communicate the purpose, activities and accomplishments of the committee to all employees.

A successful Health and Safety Committee's functions should also include, but are not limited to:

1. Conducting periodic reviews of the Agency's/Institution's written Health and Safety Program and Action Plan(s) in order to monitor progress and to make recommendations and revisions as necessary.
2. Periodically conducting health and safety inspections of individual departments to:
 - a. Identify hazards and unsafe acts for correction.
 - b. Assign corrective responsibility.
 - c. Evaluate program effectiveness.
 - d. Report to management on identified problems and progress on improving workplace health and safety.
3. Reviewing and recommending training and educational safety programs for all employees.
4. Reviewing accident reports for trends and problem areas.
5. Involving other employees/departments in various projects and functions to reaffirm everyone's responsibility for health and safety.
6. Insuring the organization's compliance with all established health and safety guidelines, policies and with applicable Department of Commerce/ OSHA standards and regulations.
7. Identifying high-risk job tasks and developing written safe operating procedures.

Note: Health and Safety Committees should function only within the scope of the authority and responsibility granted by their respective Agency/Institution and labor agreement(s).

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

In addition, the Health and Safety Committee may also wish to further promote health and safety awareness by the use of one or more of the following activities/programs:

1. Safety Contests (for example: best safety slogan of the month).
2. Poster programs/contests.
3. Audio-visual presentations.
4. Special safety/health events such as "brown bag" luncheons.
5. Guest speakers/seminars/training programs.
6. Employee suggestion programs
7. Injury prevention campaigns (backs, slips/falls etc.).
8. Special safety recognition awards.
9. Newsletters/promotional material.
10. Health/wellness fairs and activities.

ORGANIZATION:

Each health and safety committee should include a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, a Secretary, and other general members.

CHAIRPERSON:

The primary duties of this position are to:

1. Develop meeting agendas.
2. Coordinate and conduct orderly meetings.
3. Establish necessary deadlines and sub-committee assignments
4. Provide appropriate and timely follow-up on problems and recommendations developed by the committee.
5. Serve as a communication liaison between management and the committee.
6. Promote health and safety by personal example.

In order to be effective, the Chairperson:

1. Must have the confidence of other committee members, employees and management.
2. Be familiar with the general principles and concepts of health and safety management and applicable ILHR/OSHA standards.
3. Be visibly enthusiastic about his/her organization's Health and Safety Program.

Note: The chairperson may be appointed by management or (preferably) elected by majority vote of the membership.

VICE-CHAIRPERSON:

The primary duty of the Vice Chairperson is to assume leadership of the Health and Safety Committee when the chairperson is unavailable on a short-term basis, or for some reason, resigns from the Committee. The Vice-Chairperson should also serve on one or more subcommittees or task forces and take an active role in other committee activities.

The benefits of establishing this position include:

1. Ability to conduct business and hold meetings as usual in the absence of the Chairperson.
2. Continuity of Committee leadership and activities should the Chairperson leave the position for example by resignation or a scheduled rotation of leadership.
3. Assistance with the coordination and direction of the committee and subcommittee activities.

SECRETARY:

The primary duties of this position are:

1. To maintain, record and disseminate minutes of each meeting.
2. Actively promote health and safety by his/her personal example and communication with employees and supervisors.

The Secretary should be appointed by the Chairperson or elected by members of the Committee for a one year term. Rotating this post periodically to give all members an opportunity for this post is also recommended.

Note: All Health and Safety Committees should be organized in accordance with the guidelines established by each organization and their respective labor agreement(s).

GENERAL MEMBERS:

The third (and most important) element of a Health and Safety Committee is the general membership. Each committee should be made up of individuals from various areas and levels of organization representing administration, operating departments, and staff personnel. Union participation on the committee should be accordance with State/Local labor agreements. Position descriptions for general members should be written to clarify individual roles and responsibilities.

MEMBER ELIGIBILITY/TERMS OF SERVICE:

To help assure that the Health and Safety Committee remains an enthusiastic and a generally experienced group of individuals (while at the same time encouraging organization-wide participation and representation), there is a need to clearly define membership eligibility requirements and terms of service:

1. Criteria should be developed that will formally define the membership selection process, qualification requirements, length of individual membership terms, and rotation of membership procedures. These criteria should cover all membership positions/functions, including the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary and the general membership. It is important that the adopted criteria for membership selection be consistent with applicable state and local union contractual language.
2. General membership on the Health and Safety Committee should be established on a rotation basis. For example, with three-year terms, 1/3 of the general membership would change every year. With two-year terms, 1/2 the membership would change. However, careful consideration should be given to not reducing the number of experienced and knowledgeable members by having too large a percentage of the general members changing on too frequent a basis.

MEETINGS:

Health and Safety Committee meetings should be held regularly on a specific day and time and at least on a quarterly basis (i.e. the first Thursday of each month/quarter at 8:30 A.M.). New committees should consider meeting on a more frequent basis. When a meeting schedule is planned well in advance, the members are then in a better position to arrange for their attendance and prepare for discussion.

A typical Committee meeting should include:

1. Review of unfinished items from the previous meeting(s) and/or activities.
2. Status reports from any sub-committees.
3. Discussion/review of safety inspection reports and the actions taken to correct observed hazards.
4. Review of accident/incidents sustained since the previous meeting and a discussion of measures to prevent similar accidents and incidents.
5. Review of the status of current action plans or training programs.
6. Review of outstanding recommendations developed by outside loss control consultants and/or Department of Commerce health and safety compliance inspectors.
7. Discussion about activities related to future action plans and/or training programs.

8. Discussion about special activities such as health fairs.
9. Discussion about new business, future agenda items, projects and meeting dates.

SUMMARY:

Much of the potential value of a Health and Safety Committee can be lost without careful development of the purpose, functions and activities of the committee. The committee will function effectively only after the need for the committee is recognized and employees, supervisors and managers welcome its services. At their worst, Health and Safety Committees can be a “negative-minded” group confining their approach primarily to (after-the-fact) placing of blame. However, at their best, they can become an effective tool to help prevent unsafe practices and conditions, reduce the risk of injury and illnesses and to help motivate employees and supervisors to become actively involved in an agency's or institutions health and safety program.

Note: A sample guide for individual committee members is attached. Each member should be given the guide at the time of his/her initial appointment.

*** SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Professional Training Services by the Bureau of State Risk Management
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State of Wisconsin Guidelines for Health and Safety Committee Members*

WHY YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO BE ON THE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE?

1. You have shown an interest in health and safety that may benefit your fellow employees.
2. You are a safety conscious employee who sets an example for co-workers.

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS FOR BEING AN ACTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER?

1. An increase in knowledge of your agency's/institution's entire operation.
2. A better understanding of the policies, functions, and problems of management.
3. A greater awareness of the importance of relationships with outside organizations such as local safety councils and professional organizations such as the National Safety Council.
4. An ability to have a direct influence on the frequency and severity of workplace injuries and illnesses in your organization.

HOW CAN YOU BE A GOOD HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBER?

DO:

- Promote health and safety by personal example.
- Help make your own department/organization an outstanding example of accident prevention.
- Always wear the proper personal protective equipment where required.
- Keep your supervisor and fellow workers informed of any safety problems.
- Develop good listening skills.
- Consider other viewpoints/opinions.
- Contact other members of your organization's safety program if you do not understand a situation or need additional technical assistance.

DO NOT:

- Let yourself be used to obtain/repair equipment and/or develop or adapt policies that are not needed or directly related to health and safety in the workplace.
- Take a negative attitude about an unsafe condition or behavior. Work with supervisors and other staff to correct the problem in a timely manner.
- Violate established safety rules and procedures.

Always remember: Your participation in the Health and Safety Committee represents a commitment on your part in terms of both time and effort. However, the increased knowledge you gain and the rewards of helping to create a safer work environment for your fellow employees are worth the investment.

WHAT ARE YOUR DUTIES AS A SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBER?

The duties of the individual members should be to:

1. Regularly attend all meetings and actively participate in discussion and committee activities.
2. Report all unsafe conditions and unsafe acts.
3. Report all injuries and near misses involving yourself, or other employees in your respective department.
4. Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvement of health and safety.
5. Encourage safety-related input from employees.
6. Follow safety procedures and rules.
7. Influence others to work safely.
8. Conduct safety inspections.
9. Wear required personal protective equipment when required.
10. Investigate accidents when requested.
11. Share information/suggestions with other departments.

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW TO BE A BETTER COMMITTEE MEMBER?

1. You should be aware of all the machinery, materials, and equipment used in your department and the applicable Department of Commerce/OSHA health and safety standards.
2. You should know what special hazards are associated with the chemicals and other materials used in your department. You should also know if employees have been trained on the proper use of these materials.
3. You should know your organization's accident reporting procedures. You should also know where are the First Aid facilities/kits in your department/facility are located and who are the trained first aid and CPR attendants.
4. You should know what lines of communication and resources are open and available to the committee.
5. You should know the type of injuries/illnesses that are the most common in your organization and what can possibly be done to prevent them. You should also know what personal protective equipment (PPE) or other safety devices should be used by employees to protect themselves from injury/illness.
6. You should know what new processes or equipment are planned in your department/organization and which may effect the health and safety of employees.

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