

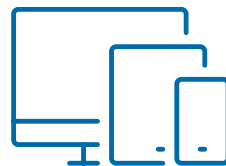
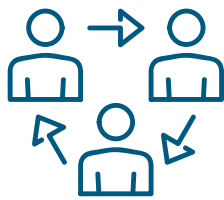
# Safety Committee Implementation Guide



Safety Committee  
Implementation Guide

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## Introduction

Every engaged and effective safety committee shares core elements, regardless of your organization's unique regional, contractual or industry sector conditions. Whether your organization's safety committees are focused on wellness, ergonomics, emergency response or overall safety performance, when launched and administered effectively your safety committee will invite safety into the core values of your organization. Your employees will know if your organization is holding safety as a value – or not.

### **This guide is here to provide:**

- Step-by-step guidance for starting a new safety committee
- Methods to communicate the need for safety committees to all organizational levels
- Effective practices to keep your safety committee vibrant and moving your organization toward its safety goals
- Templates and resources designed to help you during implementation
- Key factors to evaluate and continuously improve your safety committee

### **Why create safety committees?**

When faced with the question of why your organization needs an effective safety committee, the answer can be complex. When you know the primary focus of the committee, you will be able to help promote the benefits of safety committees appropriately.

### **An integrated safety committee:**

- Fosters employee engagement and ownership around safety practices
- Creates a problem-solving body specifically dedicated to workplace safety and health that can survive changes in management
- Provides both supervisors and managers with a team of well-trained workers they can rely upon when safety issues arise
- Creates a new workplace dynamic that likely did not exist previously, providing open lines of communication between members (management and workers)
- Provides workers with a deeper education in and understanding of workplace health and safety than what they have previously been exposed to
- Creates an environment where regulatory, contractual or corporate requirements are acted upon by a group rather than solely management
- Provides insurance and risk reduction benefits
- Promotes safe work methods and practices across operations
- Increases employee morale

## What benefits are the most important?

This depends on the audience. Your organization may have groups that will view safety committees as a central way to raise and name safety concerns or methods of hazard control.

Purpose-driven safety committees:

- Ensure workers can voice concerns about hazards they encounter in the workplace
- Manage corrective actions
- Provide a means to streamline audits/inspections
- Improve compliance
- Provide an avenue to engage in overall health and safety improvements within the operation

While safety committee participation incurs costs, overall it reduces other costs by reducing risk. When pitching the importance of a safety committee, it is best to think through which benefits will speak to your audience.

## Getting Started

Starting - or refreshing - a safety committee involves a bit of background work before you name your team. Consider the following information and make key decisions before naming your safety committee participants:

- What is the *primary* reason you are starting or revamping your safety committee?  
Are you trying to:
  - Get employees more engaged in organizational culture?
  - Stay compliant with jurisdictional or contract requirements?
  - Decrease injury and illness rates?
  - Encourage workers and managers to take overall ownership of safety and health within the workplace?

Knowing your primary effort drives the direction, goals, objectives and actions of the committee and is vital to the effectiveness and primary goals of the committee.

Once you articulate your primary reason, you're ready to follow up with tactical work. In setting up the safety and health committee determine the following:

- Is this safety and health committee going to be department(s)-based, site-based or organization-wide?
- Who will be on the committee? What is the ratio of workers to managers?
- Who will lead the committee? Will leadership be a single person or a team?
- How frequently will the committee meet?
- Will you have a pre-determined term length for your members? A rotation? Application process? (it's most effective to have employees chosen at random or to ask for volunteers - make sure it's for a specific term, and a year is often an easy option)

- What is the escalation pathway for solutions?
  - Do you have executive support for this committee as the committee will likely fail without executive support and backing?
  - If you don't have executive support, you need to get it – you need a decision maker on the committee who can escalate potential solutions to the executive team, allocate budget or approve changes to workflow
  - Different identified hazards and/or solutions may need different communication methods to “solve” the problem – identify those pathways within different relevant departments (i.e., facilities, operations, human resources)

Finally, you are ready to name your team. Your committee should be reflective of your organization and should include:

**Employees:**

Workers should be employees and/or employee representatives, and should not have managerial, hiring or firing influence unless specified by a jurisdictional requirement.

They should represent:

- Distinct locations, departments and shifts
- Varied experience levels
- Various demographic representation

**Employer Representatives:**

Employer representatives are those who have managerial, budget and/or hiring and firing influence. They, too, should represent:

- Distinct locations, departments and shifts
- Varied experience levels
- Various demographic representation

**Executive Leadership:**

This is the previously identified decision maker to escalate problems and solutions.

**“Ad hoc” Members:**

Some employees may only need to participate occasionally, such as subject matter experts in a particular field. For example, if your team wants to expand the mental health benefits for employees, your benefits lead can be brought in to discuss and work on just that issue.

**Safety and Health Professionals:**

A representative(s) from the safety and health department or the person with site safety and health responsibility should be a member of the committee.

The number of people involved in your committee is up to you, but employer representatives should not outweigh the number of employee representatives. Also, be careful the committee isn't so large as to become ineffective.

## Planning the first meeting

The first meeting should be well-planned and informative and offer members the opportunity to weigh in on how the committee works, including an overview of the charter. Your charter will act as the guidelines by which your committee operates. Sample charters can be found [here](#), but should include:

- The purpose of the committee
- An overview of roles and responsibilities
- Benefits of participation

Also, think about:

- The agenda – a mission-critical document to track and organize your priorities and communicate to the committee how they will be spending their time
  - Supply an annotated agenda to members in advance, and allow participants to add agenda items if they choose
  - Make sure your agenda includes:
    - Time for employee concerns and safety observations
    - An overview of the charter meeting times and dates – be sure to be considerate of multiple shifts
- Roles
  - Who is the chair/co-chair? How are they identified?
  - Is there a note keeper and/or timekeeper?
  - Is someone available to help communicate the work of the committee to the employees?
  - Who is responsible for addressing items brought up in the committee meetings?
- Benefits of participation
  - Are there additional benefits to participation?
- What data do you want to share with the committee?

## Moving Forward

As you move into the 'regular' phase of the committee, consider how to keep it positive. Try to:

- Make it visible – making your safety committee visible and available to all staff is important so please consider:
  - Ensuring non-committee members have a path to raise issues with the committee
  - Identifying committee members by providing shirts for all participants and encouraging them all to wear them on meetings and other days, or if hard hats are required, providing committee members with a colored hard hat (green)
  - Doing walkthroughs of your site as part of each meeting
    - Fix items you can fix on the spot
  - Inviting employees who have voiced concerns about hazards or compliance problems to join meetings to discuss potential solutions
  - Having the committee be a part of safety training
  - Posting photos of the safety committee on the company bulletin board or intranet

- Communicate constantly – and celebrate successes as communication of the committee’s activities is vital, especially as the number of items addressed grows. You can:
  - Post photos of committee accomplishments in the breakroom and on the company intranet
  - Have regular updates in staff meetings
  - Have committee members lead regular safety talks
  - Advertise ideas or work that is not yet completed, but is still in the planning stages
  - Provide corrective action feedback to workers who have raised safety issues or concerns
- Make it easy
  - Use pre-existing safety campaigns, such as National Safety Month from NSC, to guide your activities
  - Be aware of company workflows – avoid launching new initiatives during the busiest times of the year
- Avoid the “flavor of the month”
  - Have a list of follow-up priorities – items you’ve addressed already – and check them on safety walks to make sure the “fix” is still fixed

### Measuring Success

Continuous improvement is just as important for your safety committee as it is for your safety program philosophy. Identify goals and evaluation metrics that allow for growth and improvement while also adding opportunities to communicate to the workforce what the committee has accomplished.

Look back to the primary reason you are implementing this committee and use this to guide your goals. If your primary goal is to decrease slips, trips and falls in your facility but all you measure is employee engagement, communicating the ongoing value of your committee will be a challenge.

Measurement ideas could include:

- Employee safety engagement as measured through surveys, good catch/near miss reports, hazard identifications or other leading indicators
- Committee member feedback – are you:
  - Retaining your members well?
  - Using their time wisely?
  - Communicating well?
  - Listening to issues they bring to you?
- Safety issue-specific goals, such as decreasing slips, trips and falls in your facility
  - When measuring these goals, make sure you’re not just looking at the resulting number of incidents in a given time period, but also the leading indicators (hazard reports, spills identified and cleaned, etc.) that you have identified to help accomplish decreased incidents
- Third-party or corporate safety and health site audits
- Additional measures, such as time to closure for action items, number of hazards identified/mitigated, etc.

## Final Thoughts

Safety committees are a great opportunity to use the individual experience of workers to increase your facility's safety for everyone, but they can be hard to do well if you don't have strong leadership support for your committee and goals. If the experience of bringing concerns to the committee is frustrating for workers, you won't get the information you need to make your facility safe for everyone. Make sure you're ready to:

- **Commit resources and time to this committee** – if your leadership is not committed or you don't have a budget ready, you are not ready for the committee as it is crucial to have a committed champion
  - Plan regularly scheduled meetings that are posted for all to see
- **Be accountable** – treat every concern that comes to the committee as though it were a major incident and respond accordingly
- **Be communicative** – tell everyone what you're doing in a way they can receive it
  - Don't email out your accomplishments to people who don't use computers as their primary work tool
  - Be creative with communication and encourage your committee to help you get the word out
  - Make sure your communications are accessible and easily digestible
  - Communicate the value and accomplishments of this committee to your leadership regularly not just to your staff
- **Be patient** – you are building trust with your staff and this process takes time
- **Celebrate small wins as often as you can**

## Implementation Complications

Around the U.S., there are varied laws requiring, limiting or guiding your safety committee implementation, including the National Labor Relations Act relating to unfair labor practices. Normally, there are no issues with setting up a safety and health committee in a union shop as the union will be selecting the worker membership. However, in a nonunion establishment, the rules and requirements can be tricky. Therefore, it is important to check with your legal counsel, a labor law attorney, your state's OSHA or the Department of Labor for specifics.

## Additional Resources

- [Effective Safety Committees \(Safety+Health Magazine\)](#)
- [Do's, Don'ts of Employee Safety Committees \(EHS Today Magazine\)](#)
- [Six Tips for Starting a Safety Committee \(Safety+Health Magazine\)](#)
- [Recorded Safety Committees Discussion](#)



## Implementation Guide Questionnaire

**Get started by using this section to work through your answers to the questions posed in this implementation guide.**

What can be addressed by your committee (check all that apply)

- Injury and illness rates are too high
- I know the specific injury rates we are trying to decrease
- I don't know the specific injury rates we are trying to decrease  
*You can begin with your workers' compensation insurance provider to help identify where to start if you don't know your specific injury rates by category.*
- I have regulatory or contract requirements for a safety committee

Our specific regulatory/contract requirements: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Leadership wants a committee, but I don't have a clear understanding of what they want me to accomplish  
*Start with your injury rates and find out where your most expensive losses have come from. Not all leadership focuses on injury rates, but it is a good place to start. Also, review the references for safety and health committees previously listed.*

- Employee safety engagement

Our specific concerns around employee safety engagement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Other \_\_\_\_\_

The primary problem I'm trying to solve with a safety committee is (be specific and objective here - for example, "we want to battle complacency" is not objective, but "we want to increase the number and quality of our near miss reports so we can identify areas in which people are potentially at risk" is objective): \_\_\_\_\_

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We will measure success in addressing the primary problem by: \_\_\_\_\_

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Is this committee going to be site/department-specific?

Yes, department: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, site-specific but all departments

No, organization-wide

Ideal number of safety committee members:

Number of shifts/departments represented (worker representatives)

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Employer representatives

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Executive sponsor

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Safety Department representative

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Will the participants volunteer, be asked to join the committee or both?

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What is the term length? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the escalation pathway for solutions?

Executive sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilities lead: \_\_\_\_\_

Process: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do we have a method of receiving concerns from staff?

Yes

The effectiveness and possible improvement ideas for this method may be a good agenda item

No

Developing a method of receiving concerns should be an agenda item

What communication methods do we have available to our staff?

Intranet

Break room televisions

Posters/signage/bulletin boards

Team meetings

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

