

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Employer's Guide: Health and Safety Committees

A work site health and safety committee is a communications link between workers and management. Its purpose is to promote awareness and interest within the company in health and safety at the work site. Committee members work together to identify and help solve health and safety concerns.

Joint work site health and safety committees are only mandatory for those work sites required by Ministerial Order to have a committee. For all other work sites in Alberta, the establishment of a committee is voluntary.

By voluntarily establishing a committee at your work site, the management and workers are making a commitment to improving the health and safety culture of your workplace. You can eliminate hazards and reduce incidents associated with work processes.

Why have a joint work site health and safety committee at your site?

Every employer and worker in the province has a moral and legal responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy work site.

Consider these concerns from those who have joint work site health and safety committees at their places of work:

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- From a construction project superintendent...
“...You guys in occupational health and safety have these requirements about running a safe job. We’re responsible – I’m responsible – for everything that might go wrong, and the sub-trades have got to carry their share too. I absolutely insist every major trade have someone attend every safety committee meeting. It’s the best way – the only way – to ensure the subs look after their responsibilities. I wouldn’t want a job anymore where we didn’t have a safety committee.”

- From a plant superintendent...
“...Originally when you first asked us to form a committee, if you’ll excuse the butcher’s language, I thought it would be nothing but a load of - - , a pain in the - - . Today, if I was starting up a plant of my own, it would be the first thing. It has saved me money, money through compensation, money through things they’ve seen that were unsafe, things falling, getting damaged. We think it’s a must for any operation, we really do. These guys have really gotten into it, and we would not be without it.”

- From a committee co-chairman at a foundry...
“...We’ve got a long way to go yet, but there is a safety awareness that wasn’t there before.”

- From a worker co-chairman...
“...Before the committee started, workers felt nothing was done. Now it is done and workers see it’s getting done.”

Once a successful health and safety committee has been in operation, few managers would want to be without it. But the key word is “successful”. Committee members need the strong support of company management since they are the ones who make things happen. Health and safety must be managed just like production, quality and maintenance.

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What the joint health and safety committee does

- Inspects the work site for hazards.
- Responds to health and safety concerns brought to it by workers.
- Helps find solutions to difficult health and safety concerns — problems that can only be solved through co-operative efforts.
- Analyses the causes of incidents to prevent recurrence.
- May assist in the development of realistic safety policies and safe work procedures.
- May help with new employee orientation to identify potential health and safety hazards.
- Promotes health and safety awareness throughout the work force.

How the health and safety committee functions

The committee conducts inspections which are followed seven to ten day later by a meeting of the committee members. On construction projects, inspections and meetings are usually held more frequently. Hazards of the housekeeping nature or “fix-its” are listed following the inspection and passed on to supervisors for action. “Fix-its” should be few as they are dealt with by supervisors on a daily basis.

Remaining problems are discussed at the meeting to identify their real causes, then solutions are proposed or recommended for management to consider. Some of these solutions may involve employee training, review of job procedures, or a clarification of safety policy. In all of these the health and safety committee may be of direct assistance. Total time involved is a small price to pay when compared to the high cost of workplace incidents causing injury and illnesses today.

Benefits of a successful health and safety committee

Injuries decrease

Time lost due to injuries is reduced. Associated costs such as overtime, retraining, and wages paid to other workers who stopped work or assisted after incident are often avoided.

Occupational diseases prevented

The acute effects of harmful chemicals — headache, dizziness, nausea, disorientation, poisoning and skin problems — may be prevented. Long term or chronic effects such as cancer, lung disease or nerve damage may also be prevented if appropriate measures are taken to protect workers.

Morale of the work force improves

The committee draws attention to needs and improvements in health and safety. It provides each worker with a communication channel to ensure their concerns receive attention. Workers can see the results and know that the employer is genuinely interested in eliminating hazards. The work site becomes a safer, cleaner, more orderly, and more agreeable place to work.

Damage decreases

There is generally little difference between the causes of an incident that damages material or equipment and the incident that damages a worker's body — both have costly consequences.

Production stoppages are reduced

Consider how much downtime is the result of equipment failure or poor work habits. Such stoppages could be reduced through the work of a successful health and safety committee on a regular basis.

Waste of material decreases

Waste is often the result of poor work procedures that can be brought under control by an increased awareness of health and safety.


How to get started


If you have decided to have a health and safety committee at your work site, there is plenty of assistance available to make your job easier. Alberta Employment and Immigration can provide guidance. Information booklets on the subject are available from the province-wide contact centre or the department's web site.

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and Immigration can
provide guidance.

Safety committee effectiveness programs are offered by consultants for members of the committees, co-chairman and management interested in improving the effectiveness of an exiting committee.

For more information


 http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_li003.pdf
Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee Member's Guide

 http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_li004.pdf
Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee - Handbook

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<http://industry.alberta.ca/whs-ohs>

Call any Government of Alberta office toll-free
Dial 310-0000, then the area code and telephone number you want to reach

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