EFFECTIVE SAFETY COMMITTEES

A company's safety culture is only as strong as the effort everyone puts into it. No one wants their employees to get injured but just hoping it does not happen is not enough. It starts with upper management's commitment to safety and the safety committee. If the commitment is strong, the committee's efforts will be strong, and you will see an improved safety culture. An effective safety committee can help create a safer work environment, improve communication on safety related topics, reduce lost time accidents, and enhance employee morale.

The first part to consider when creating or evaluating your safety committee is how many employees you need to serve on the committee. Seven to ten employees should give you a solid committee, but some larger organizations will most likely have more. The key is to keep size of the committee manageable and effective. When you have too many people on the committee, some voices may never be heard.

A strong safety culture is cultivated by encouraging everyone's commitment and involvement. For this reason, the safety committee should be representative of everyone in your business. Participation should range from upper management to front line employees. There should be at least one upper management representative along with a representative from each department that makes up your organization. This will help bring voices to the table that can provide insight on safety policies as it relates to different departments. Through the years, many organizations have found that what looks great on paper winds up being inefficient when put in motion. This is normally due to a lack of input from an integral part of the implementation process.

The next important aspect of your committee is its structure. You need to have a committee chairperson and a secretary. An effective committee leader can facilitate a meeting without dominating it or allowing someone else to do so. The chairperson should encourage participation among all members. Effective committees will have basic ground rules and ensure meetings do not get out of control. Setting an agenda and time limits for each topic will help the committee chair stick to those ground rules. As for time limits, the entire meeting should not last more than an hour.

The secretary will prepare the meeting agenda and notify members of the date and location of the meeting. He or she will also gather agenda items and the related materials, call the roll, record the minutes, and distribute the minutes after the meeting.

Now that we have discussed the size, representation, and structure of an effective safety committee, let's talk about what the committee can do to promote your safety culture. They can assist with:

- Safety program development and implementation/communication
    - Safe lifting
    - Trenching
    - Confined Space
    - Return to Work
- Facility safety inspections
- Employee and visitor accident investigation (February 2020 Risk Advisor article)
- Regulatory compliance
- Emergency Response Plans
    - Fire
    - Flood
    - Hurricane
    - Inclement weather
    - Bomb threat
    - Active Shooter
- Provide relatable scenarios for safety training classes
- Ergonomic assessments
- Job hazard analysis

Safety committee meetings do not always have to involve only committee members. Bring in outside speakers and subject matter experts to gain a better understanding of safety issues. You can bring in a first responder to talk to the committee about trenching safety or the county's emergency management director prior to hurricane season. You can also invite your TWCARMF Risk Control Consultant to come in and discuss a topic of your choosing. Safety breakfasts/lunches or safety awards are other ways to change things up and inject excitement into the committee.

The best safety cultures require everyone's involvement. An effective safety committee is a step towards achieving that goal. Many safety committees struggle due to a lack of structure, motivation, guidance, or all the above. When effective, committees are the backbone to an organization's safety efforts. They can help write policies and programs, investigate accidents, provide input for emergency response plans, and recognize employees for safe work practices. This assistance helps create a safer work environment that contributes to increased morale of your employees.