

# BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY COMMITTEES

## Your Workplace Safety Committee

One way in which management can encourage employee participation in any workplace safety program is to create a Safety Committee. The committee can help share with management the responsibilities for implementing and monitoring the company / organization safety program. Typical committee duties include:

- Developing safe work practices.
- Developing written safety programs.
- Facilitating safety training.
- Workplace self-inspections.
- Accident investigations.

The committee also can help promote other activities (inside and outside of work) that encourage employees to support the organization's safety program.

Developing a culture of safety in your workplace not only holistically supports your employees, but it's also proven to directly—positively—impact the company's bottom line.

The following pages will guide you / your company in the creation and successful work of a safety committee.

Thank you.

WorkSafe MT  
Best Practices for Workplace Safety Committees

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## INTRODUCTION

Safety committees take many different forms. Ideally, the committee should have representation from both management and labor, as well as from all departments and shifts. A formal safety committee is not the only way. In small organizations it may be as effective to have all employees attend a monthly or quarterly (at a minimum) safety meeting during which safety issues and concerns are discussed and recent incidents and injuries are reviewed. Some organizations may designate a group such as department heads to fulfill the functions of the safety committee; as long as employee input is solicited, such a group can accomplish the safety committee's stated duties.

## SCOPE

This information was prepared as an outline to help you organize your safety committee or similar group. As is the case with all parts of your safety program, to be effective the safety committee must have clearly defined roles, responsibilities and goals.

## MONTANA SAFETY CULTURE ACT

The Montana Safety Culture Act enacted by the 1993 state legislature encourages workers and employers to come together to create and implement a workplace safety philosophy. It is the intent of the act to raise workplace safety to a preeminent position in the minds of all Montana's workers and employers. Implementation of the act is overseen by the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

It is the intent of the department that employer and employees meet together to create a safety culture in Montana workplaces and reduce on-the-job injuries, fatalities and illnesses. It is hoped that by improving occupational safety, workers' compensation insurance rates for all industries in Montana will be reduced. Therefore, *the act requires that all employers with more than five employees have a safety committee.* The requirements for safety committees follow.

### Every Safety Committee Shall:

- 1. Be composed of employee and employer representatives and hold regularly scheduled meetings, at least once every four months.**

*Recommendations:* The safety committee should:

- a. Be of sufficient size and number to provide for effective representation of the workforce.
- b. Employers with multiple sites have more than one safety committee (possibly having site-specific committees in addition to a companywide or headquarters committee).

- 2. Include in its employee membership volunteers or members elected by their peers.**

- 3. Include safety committee activities that assist the employer in fact-finding.**

*Recommendations:* The department recommends that the committee document its activities and act as a fact-finding body and report to the employer regarding:

- a. Assessing and controlling hazards.
- b. Assessing safety training and awareness topics.
- c. Communication with employees regarding safety committee activities.
- d. Developing safety rules, policies and procedures.
- e. Educating employees on safety-related topics.
- f. Evaluating the safety program on a regular basis.
- g. Inspecting the workplace.
- h. Keeping job-specific training current.
- i. Motivating employees to create a safety culture in the workplace.
- j. Reviewing incidents of workplace accidents, injuries and illnesses.

## PURPOSE OF A SAFETY COMMITTEE

Safety committees should be established for the following purposes:

1. To promote and maintain the interest of employees in health and safety issues.
2. To educate 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 ensure compliance with federal and state health and safety standards.

## STEPS TO FORMING YOUR WORKPLACE SAFETY COMMITTEE

**1. Determine the structure of the safety committee.** Each safety committee should include a chairperson, a vice chairperson, a secretary and general members.

*Note:* All committees should be organized in accordance with the guidelines established by each organization and its respective labor agreement(s).

### **Chairperson:**

The primary duties of this position are to:

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

In order to be effective, the chairperson:

- Must have the confidence of other committee members, employees and management.
- Be familiar with the general principles and concepts of health and safety management and applicable OSHA standards and company policies.
- Be visibly enthusiastic about his/her organization's safety program.

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

### **Vice chairperson:**

The primary duties of this position are to:

- Assume leadership of the committee when the chairperson is unavailable, on a short-term basis, or resigns from the committee.
- Serve on one or more subcommittee or task force and take an active role in other committee activities.
- Be visibly enthusiastic about his/her organization's health and safety program.

The benefits of establishing this position include:

- Ability to conduct business and hold meetings as usual in the absence of the chairperson.
- Continuity of committee leadership and activities should the chairperson leave the position, for example by resignation or a scheduled rotation of leadership.

- Assistance with the coordination and direction of the committee and subcommittee activities.

### **Secretary:**

The primary duties of this position are:

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

*Note:* 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 the opportunity is also recommended.

### **General members:**

The fourth (and most important) element of any health and safety committee is the general membership. Each committee should be made up of individuals from various areas and levels of the organization—representing administration, operating departments and staff personnel. Union participation on the committee should be in accordance with state / local labor agreements. Position descriptions for general members should be written to clarify individual roles and responsibilities.

### **Member eligibility / Term of service:**

To help ensure that the safety committee remains an enthusiastic and a generally experienced group of individuals (while at the same time encouraging organizationwide participation and representation), clearly define membership eligibility requirements and terms of service:

- Develop criteria that formally defines 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.
- General membership on the committee should be established on a rotation basis. For example, with three-year terms one third of the general membership would change every year. With two-year terms, half 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.

**2. Determine the optimum size of your committee.** Determine the ideal number of people to be part of your safety committee. If you are forming a joint labor-management safety committee, keep in mind the importance of maintaining balance in the number of representatives from each group. Remember to include representatives from the various departments and work groups. If you elect to utilize the “all employee safety meeting” method, then this point is moot. A target of five to 10 committee members is usually a good-sized group.

**3. Determine the specific committee members.** You may elect to handpick the specific employees you think would make good committee members; make sure to represent all employee groups and shifts. You may choose to issue an open invitation to employees and supervisory personnel, asking for volunteers. Either way, the goal is to have individuals who can work together as a team, and who are willing to do what they can to promote safety in their workplace. Depending on the response to your invitation, you still may need to ask specific individuals to join the committee. If the response is high, you may need to maintain a waiting list. It is a good idea to periodically rotate members on and off the committee, to help prevent burnout and to keep fresh ideas and energy flowing through the group.

**4. Top management involvement.** Top management must support the safety committee, so that all employees understand that the commitment to safety is serious. If top management is a member of the committee, he/she should remember to encourage all members’ involvement in the discussion of safety issues and concerns. Should top management elect not to become a committee member, top management should attend the initial meeting and visit periodically after that. Top management should also review the meeting minutes and be available to respond to questions and concerns from the committee. Most importantly, management must establish the authority of the committee and then support it.

**5. Conduct the initial safety committee meeting.** The first meeting should cover the following items:

- Welcome members to the committee.
- Set a schedule for the committee to meet (for instance, the first Tuesday of every month at 2 p.m.) that is as convenient as possible for all members.
- Determine who will be the committee officers (chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary); you may wish to have temporary officers until the committee has met at least a couple of times.

- Discuss the duties of the committee and determine which duties should initially receive the highest priority. Some examples would include conducting facility self-inspections, developing required written safety programs and conducting incident/accident reviews.
- Determine the need for subcommittees to take responsibility for some of the priority items. Subcommittees should advance their projects between meetings of the full committee, reporting progress at full meetings. This should help keep the length of full committee meetings to an hour or less.

**6. Review the progress of the committee at least annually.**

Each year the safety committee’s progress should be reviewed in order to evaluate the group’s success in helping the organization meet its safety goals and objectives. Identify both progress and deficiencies so the committee’s efforts can be refined as necessary to best help the organization to continue to make progress toward an accident-free workplace.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF A SAFETY COMMITTEE

To be effective, your safety committee needs to do the following:

- Hold meetings on a regular basis, following a consistent schedule.
- Set clear meeting agendas, publish them in advance and follow them.
- Keep minutes of each meeting that summarize the issues discussed, the proposed actions to be taken, and the person(s) responsible for follow-up on each item. Minutes should be published and provided to each committee member, as well as made available to all employees.
- Members should be required to attend all meetings, except in case of emergency. If a member cannot attend a meeting, then an alternate should be sent. Take attendance at each meeting and record in the minutes.
- Publicize the committee’s accomplishments, as well as assistance to management.
- Find ways to recognize the efforts of individuals and groups within the company / organization who make significant contributions to the safety program.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### **Montana Safety and Health Bureau**

(406) 444-6401 or online at <http://erd.dli.mt.gov/safety-and-health-bureau.html>.

Guidelines for Effective Safety Committee Meetings

*(Download the document at [http://erd.dli.mt.gov/images/stories/pdf/safety\\_health/programs/safetycommitteeoutline.pdf](http://erd.dli.mt.gov/images/stories/pdf/safety_health/programs/safetycommitteeoutline.pdf).)*

#### **Occupational Safety & Health Administration**

1 (800) 321-6742 or online at <http://www.osha.gov/index.html>.

#### **Montana State Fund**

1 (800) 332-6102 or online at <http://safemt.com/>.

Safety Committee Guidelines

*(Download the document at <http://www.safemt.com/index.php/improving-workplace-safety/safety-planning/safety-committee>.)*

#### **The Montana Safety Culture Act of 1993**

Online at [http://www.worksafemt.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=63](http://www.worksafemt.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=63).

### **Planning Guide and Sample Safety Committee Meeting Minutes**

The guide and meeting minute form that follow are intended to help you in forming your organization's safety committee. Each key element is included. Each company / organization will need to carefully analyze its own safety issues and available resources so that the safety committee can be structured to your specific operation.

## SAFETY COMMITTEE PLANNING GUIDE

### A. General organization of safety committees

1. Management should officially announce the formation of the safety committee. This should include a brief description of the committee's function and current membership, and should solicit cooperation from all departments.
2. The committee members should have knowledge of their work areas, interest in supporting safety and the support of their peers. All employee levels, departments and shifts should be represented.
3. Safety committees should have access to and communications with top management through direct reporting and/or distribution of meeting minutes to all key management officers and department heads.
4. The safety committee needs the full backing of management if it is to function effectively. Management should monitor the committee to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.

### B. Typical duties of a committee

1. Report unsafe conditions and suggest corrective actions.
2. Meet at least monthly; less frequently for smaller departments or operations, but at least meet quarterly.
3. Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of committee officers and members.
4. Review incidents, near misses, supervisor's Accident Investigation Reports, and, on a periodic basis, claim summaries and loss analysis.
5. Review all serious injuries—not for faultfinding, but for fact-finding to prevent a reoccurrence of the same or similar incident.
6. Contribute ideas and suggestions for improvements in safety.
7. Work safely and influence others to work safely.
8. Make periodic facility safety audits.
9. Sponsor and coordinate contests, poster programs, safety drives, etc., and supply other informational materials that help promote safer operations.
10. Develop, implement and review written safety programs (job-specific and companywide).
11. Build enthusiasm for safety programs.
12. Direct involvement with organizationwide safety training.
13. Establish dispute resolution procedures.
14. Propose and create safety checklists.
15. Identify high-risk job tasks and develop written safe operating procedures.

### C. Goal setting

1. Short term (one to six months) and long term (longer than six months).
2. Goals should be measurable and achievable.
3. Goals should be reviewed periodically to determine the effectiveness of the committee and to reset or restate goal targets.

### D. Safety committee meeting agenda

Committee chairman should call the meeting to order; the secretary should take minutes of the meeting, if the secretary is not present the chairman should designate a member to take minutes. Proceed with business in the following suggested order:

#### 1. Call to order

- Call meeting to order, introduce guests, speakers, agenda changes, etc.
- Read minutes of previous meeting. Note corrections or changes.

#### 2. Old business

- Discuss status of previously submitted recommendations.
- Request status report on any other pending old business.
- Set target dates for completion of recommendations and other pending items.
- Status report of goals and objectives.

#### 3. Accident review

- Brief summary of number and type of incidents reported since last meeting.
- Discuss severe or potentially severe cases, including action to be taken or suggested to minimize exposure.
- Brief summary of number and type of accidents for the year to date. Discuss any problem trends.
- Evaluate effectiveness of supervisor's investigation / prevention efforts.

#### 4. Inspection reports

- Report findings of safety inspections made by committee members or others. Department operations should be inspected on a rotating basis.
- Discuss and decide on action to be recommended as a result of reports. Identify who will be responsible and establish time frame for action.

### 5. New business

- Request committee members submit safety suggestions (brainstorm).
- Comment on new safety procedures, equipment, etc., of interest to the committee.
- Plan and schedule safety-training programs.
- Other new business.

### 6. Goals / Planning (possible topics)

- List each new recommendation submitted at the meeting. Identify action to be taken prior to the next meeting and by whom.
- Offsite tours and training.
- Guest speakers.
- Insurance and loss control consultants.
- Present safety awards.

### E. Common safety committee mistakes

- The group has no clear-cut job to perform, or the committee has no reason to exist.
- There is talk, talk, talk . . . without decisions or action.
- People are appointed who are neither interested nor experienced.
- The chairperson is not qualified by experience, desire or ability.
- The group has no orderly plan, no time schedule.
- People do not show up for meetings and inspections.
- The work of the committee is not recognized by employees or by management.
- Agendas are sent out late or distributed only at the meetings.
- Minutes are sent out late. Minutes should be distributed as soon as possible after the meeting, with reminders of assigned tasks.

### F. Essentials of an effective safety committee

- Top management officials should attend safety committee meetings (at least periodically). They must show interest in the safety program to both supervisory management and labor.
- Mission statement. Clear statement that supports the safety committee and states what management is looking for and what it is expecting to get from the committee. Gives the committee guidelines to meet the requirements of upper management.

- Improved inspections.
  - > Implement cooperative inspections that include workers and management representatives.
  - > Make inspections positive and gratifying by noting not just the negative but also the positive conditions in the workplace.
  - > Issue rewards after inspections.
- Chairperson must show strong leadership, keep things moving.
- The committee should address legitimate safety issues only. The committee should not become a format for negotiating union business or airing grievances.
- Meeting agendas must be established and provided to members in advance. The agenda should establish a starting and ending time for the meeting.
- Minutes of each meeting should be circulated to all members and management within two to three working days following each meeting.
- Members must be expected by management to attend meetings and to schedule the necessary time.
- Acknowledgment. Recognize the committee for its positive impact on the workplace. Bringing the success of the committee to everyone's attention makes others want to be part of it.
- The minutes should include the names of members who did not attend as well as those members who did attend.
- Let all employees of the organization know about the committee. Post minutes or notices, put articles in newsletters. Solicit input from fellow employees.
- Be positive. Give credit where credit is due. Keep employees informed of the committee's activities.

# SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## A. Attendance:


B. Call to Order: \_\_\_\_\_

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C. Old Business: \_\_\_\_\_

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D. Corrective Actions Taken: \_\_\_\_\_

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E. Accident / Incident Review: \_\_\_\_\_

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F. Recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

G. Suggestion Box / Department Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

H. New Business: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I. Review of Committee Goals / Projects / Planning: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

J. Next Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_