



The Ultimate  
**SAFETY  
COMMITTEE**  
Handbook

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A comprehensive guide to help you start and run an effective safety committee or team.

PREVIEW

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# The Ultimate Safety Committee Handbook

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Safety committees mean involvement!**

If you want to have the maximum positive impact from the investment in safety and health, involve employees whenever possible. It is the right thing to do and smart business, too. Here's why:

Your workers are the persons most exposed to potential safety and health hazards. They have a vested interest in effective safety programs. Line workers can be highly valuable problem-solvers. Safety program decisions involving employees take advantage of their wider field of experience. Employees are far more likely to support and use programs in which they have had input. They value what they own!

When you take their contributions seriously, employees are much more satisfied. Line workers usually have a more detailed knowledge of operations. Knowledgeable and aware employees tend to be safe workers and also good sources of ideas for better hazard prevention and control.

### **What's the key? Communication**

The key to a successful safety and health program is effective communications. To help make sure communication is efficient and effective, it is important an employer creates a knowledgeable internal team that fosters communication. The Safety Committee has this important responsibility. Consequently, in this handbook we are going to explore concepts and tools to help you:

- Start and grow an effective labor-management safety committee;
- Assess and evaluate your current safety committee; and
- Recommend changes to improve the effectiveness of your safety committee.

# 1. ROLE, PURPOSE, AND FUNCTION

## Introduction

You do not have to climb a mountain and sit on a big rock for six days to get some idea of what the safety committee is all about and your place in it. However, it is important you do get a good picture (clear vision) about how you and the safety committee can complement the mission of your company. To get a clear picture, you must first understand the **role** and **purpose(s)** of the safety committee so it may **function** to help, not hurt, the organization's ability to keep the workplace safe and healthful.

## Why We Do What We Do

The performance of the safety committee is a direct result of the role the safety committee plays. Simply put, what we do depends on who we think we are. So, naturally, the safety committee needs first to understand its role within the organization. Once the safety committee understands its role, an effective safety committee plan may be developed that describes its role, purpose, objectives, and strategies to meet them. So let's take a look at the safety committee's role and purpose a little more closely.

## Role Defined

If you look up the term "role" in the dictionary, you will find something like:

- The characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual; or
- A position or title.

The "role we play" helps define who we are, how we should act, and what we should be doing as an individual or as a member of a group.

The position or title you hold in an organization carries with it certain expectations of performance associated with the position. You play the role you are expected to play depending on the position you have. In reality, we play many roles both at work and home. You probably play the role of one or more of the following positions: mother, father, coach, scout leader, music teacher, electrician, pastor, police officer, nurse, or mayor. If you pay attention, you'll notice how our behaviors change depending on the role we happen to be playing at the moment.



## Role of the Safety Committee

One way of looking at the role of the safety committee that is probably most effective is to think of it as an internal consultant group. The expectations of the safety committee should have expectations and responsibilities similar to that of an external consultant hired by the company.

## Purpose of the Safety Committee

Armed with insight into the role of the safety committee, let's take a look at what its purpose or mission might be. A quick review of our friendly dictionary once again defines **purpose** as:

- A desired or intended result or effect.

As you learned above, the safety committee performs the role of an internal consultant group with primary responsibilities to provide expert advice and assistance. Some companies create a "vision statement" that reflects **who they are**. The vision statement is a statement about their role in the community and society in general.

A company might also write a mission statement that explains **what they do** to support their vision. The "purpose" of the safety committee can also be described as its "mission." Purpose reflects what the safety committee intentionally does to support its assigned role.

## Reasons Why Safety Committees Exist

What are some of the primary reasons for the safety committee? Let's summarize:

- Help protect the employer by providing useful information.
- Help protect the employee by responding to safety concerns.
- Bring labor and management together in a cooperative way to solve problems.
- Help the employer educate and motivate all employees about the importance of safety.
- Help the employer educate and motivate all supervisors and managers to identify hazards and take corrective action.

All of these purpose statements emphasize the safety committee's responsibility to **assist** the employer, not to **do** the safety job for the employer. Management may be able to delegate authority for managing safety programs to the safety committee on paper, but that is not feasible if the workplace is determined to be unsafe as a result of an OSHA inspection. The responsibility for safety and health lies squarely on the shoulders of line managers from top to bottom because they, not the safety committee, control workplaces.

## How Safety Committees Fulfill Their Purposes

OK, so now we have a good idea what the safety committee's role is. An understanding of the safety committee's role shapes its purpose, which includes the following:

- Gather information by conducting inspections, audits, surveys and interviews.
- Identify problems, including hazardous workplace conditions and unsafe behaviors (surface symptoms).
- Determine the causes or problems, which may be underlying safety management system weaknesses (root causes) contributing to hazardous conditions and unsafe behaviors.
- Develop solutions and submit recommendations.
- Monitor progress of changes.
- Recommend further revisions and improvements.

It is important to note that none of these responsibilities requires the safety committee to control a budget, safety programs, or people. When the safety committee assumes the role of a consultant group within the company, it is not expected to control a budget, conduct safety training, purchase equipment or correct hazards. These responsibilities are more properly that of line managers, from the CEO down through the first-line supervisor.

## Effective Communication

One of the most important responsibilities of the individual safety committee representative is to receive safety concerns from employees, report those concerns to the safety committee, and provide timely feedback to employees on the status or response to those concerns. Failure to effectively fulfill this important responsibility has the potential to render the safety committee unsuccessful in its ability to help the employer solve safety-related problems.

The safety committee also communicates directly with management. This is done primarily through written recommendations and other safety committee minutes. Once again, the ability to run effective meetings, and write concise minutes and strong recommendations that provide useful information is critical in fulfilling this purpose. In some instances, the safety committee may be quick to accuse management of a lack of support when, in reality, the safety committee, itself, is not providing useful information enabling management to take timely action on recommendations.

The key to ensuring that a safety committee can fulfill both of communication's purposes above is, of course, quality education and training.