

# Health and Safety Committee Orientation Kit



# What does a safety and health committee do?

Safety and health committees are the backbone of a solid plan to prevent injuries.

## **LOOK HIGH AND LOW**

Joint committees can:

- identify the hazardous conditions in your workplace
- walk through and inspect your worksite every month
- investigate and keep track of all injuries and accidents
- look at past injury records to understand risk factors

## **MAKE IT HAPPEN**

Joint committees can:

- look at existing injury prevention policies and programs and see if they are effective
- plan training and education programs for managers and workers in all job titles
- help workers get the information they need to ensure the workplace is safe, to work safely
- review and approve new equipment before it is bought
- keep an open line of communication between managers and workers

## **Duties and Functions of joint committees**

A joint committee has the following duties and functions in relation to its workplace:

- to identify situations that may be unhealthy or unsafe for workers and advise on effective systems for responding to those situations.
- to consider and expeditiously deal with complaints relating to the health and safety of workers
- to consult with workers and the employer on issues related to occupational health and safety and occupational environment.
- to make recommendations to the employer and the workers for the improvement of the occupational health and safety and occupational environment of workers
- to make recommendations to the employer on educational programs promoting the health and safety of workers and compliance with this part



and the regulations and to monitor their effectiveness

- to advise the employer on programs and policies required under the regulations for the workplace and to monitor their effectiveness
- to advise the employer on proposed changes to the workplace or the work processes that may affect the health or safety of workers
- to ensure that accident investigations and regular inspections are carried out as required by this part and the regulations
- to participate in inspections, investigations and inquiries as provided in this part and the regulations
- to carry out any other duties and functions prescribed by regulation.

### **Road map for health and safety committees**

An effective health and safety committee's main goal is to improve working conditions and prevent injuries and illnesses. Since there are many problems to solve, the committee will need to see its work as an ongoing process. There are several parts of this process.

**Reach out** to your co-workers. Find out what they think. Take the time to listen to their concerns.

**Develop a list** of health and safety problems. Write down what you find out from talking to other workers in your workplace. This will help you choose which concerns the committee should address and in what order. It also keeps other workers informed and lets them know that the committee is listening to what they have to say.

**Pick a few health and safety issues** to tackle first. The committee can't solve every problem at once. You will have to choose carefully which ones to try to solve and when. This may be one of the hardest tasks facing your committee. Concerns raised by some workers may not be the same problems you would tackle first. Make a plan of action and ensure that your recommendations are made in writing to the employer.

**Evaluate the activity** to see if it is working. A health and safety committee will only learn by doing and then discussing what worked, what didn't work, and why.

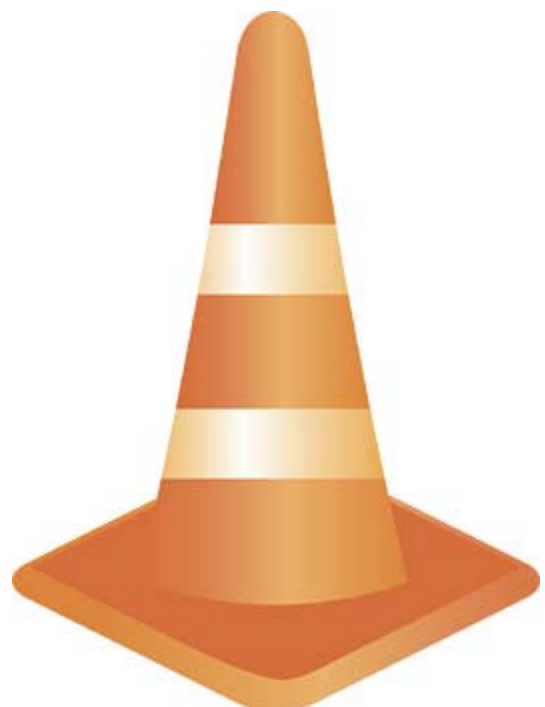
**Start small** and build toward bigger changes. A health and safety committee should try to solve small or easy problems before they try to make major changes. Take a look at the list of problems given to the committee by the workers. First try to fix the ones you feel can be solved easily. Build your committee on small successful changes. Tougher problems can be solved based on the experience gained from small beginnings.

### **Who should serve on a safety and health committee?**

A well-run safety and health committee should have equal numbers of labour and management representatives. It must have at least 4 members, at least half must be worker reps.

Labour representatives must be chosen by the union. The labour reps should represent and be in touch with workers in a wide variety of job titles.

Management members are usually picked by the employer but must exercise managerial functions. The committee will work best if management representatives have real decision-making power, this is a WCB requirement.



# Information is power

Joint labour/management safety and health committees need to be informed in order to function. Knowledge of ergonomic principles, laws and regulations, and prevention and treatment of injuries will help build the reputation of the committee.

Your committee will need to find and review information about the prevention of sprain and strain injuries. Luckily, there are many good resources and centers that can help you get the information you need.

## **WHERE TO GET INFORMATION**

Your union's health and safety department and area office can assist in many ways. The BCGEU provides additional information and provides training programs on health and safety. Contact your Regional area office for further information

**OHSAH** has a resource library with pamphlets, booklets, and other information about a wide variety of safety and health topics. For more information, [www.ohsah.bc.ca](http://www.ohsah.bc.ca)

**CCOHS** is the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. They



research workplace health and safety problems. Their toll-free number is 1-800-668-4284.

**Your employers written policies** on health and safety can be a good source of information. Most employers will have written plans for safety and health issues such a safe lifting procedures, chemicals you work with, accident reporting, and many others.

## **Other employer obligations to support committee**

The employer must provide the joint committee with the equipment, premises and clerical personnel necessary for the carrying out of its duties and functions. On request of the joint committee, the employer must provide the committee with information respecting:

- the identification of known or reasonably foreseeable health or safety hazards to which workers at the workplace are likely to be exposed
- health and safety experience and work practices and standards in similar or other industries of which the employer has knowledge
- orders, penalties and prosecutions under this part of the regulations relating to health and safety at the workplace, and
- any other matter prescribed by regulation.

## **Register for courses**

BCGEU members are encouraged to register for OHS courses. Check them out on the BCGEU web site or call 1-800-667-1033.



# Making it work

**Make it regular.** The committee should meet on a regular basis, at least once a month. The committee should have a plan to meet in case an emergency meeting is needed.

**A solid agenda.** Work from an agenda developed by both labour and management.

**Write it down.** Keep minutes and check them carefully. Minutes should be reviewed and approved by both sides. The minutes are your written record of every complaint discussed at the meeting. The minutes also record the solutions offered to the problems. Make sure that every important decision is in the minutes.

**Know who's responsible.** List every action to be taken in the minutes. The person responsible for the action should be clearly identified and given a time line.

**Report back.** Management representatives should communicate with all management personnel to keep them up to date about all problems, proposed solutions, timelines, and other concerns.

**Stay in touch.** Union representatives should talk to all local officers, shop stewards, and all workers about the ongoing work of

the committee. Send them a copy of the minutes to keep them informed about what the committee is doing and to show them the committee is listening to what they have to say, minutes must be posted.

**No free lunch.** Work time must be provided for all committee activities. This includes times for committee meetings, regular workplace inspections, attending and conducting safety and health training programs, and other activities.

**Make it happen.** Be familiar with language about joint management safety and health committees in your collective bargaining agreements. This can also help start committees in workplaces where they have not yet formed.

**Take a walk.** Inspect the workplace on a regular basis. Since working conditions change all the time, a walk-through should take place once a month.

**Learn as much as possible** about the hazards and risk factors in your workplace.

# Health and safety committee activities

There is no set list of activities for a good joint labour/management health and safety committee. A really effective committee will be limited only by its imagination and energy.

Here are some activities that joint committees can do:

**Use checklists** and surveys to collect information.

**Educate co-workers** and management personnel. Some ways to do this include:

- reports at staff, union, and management meetings
- posters on bulletin boards
- the BCGEU Health and Safety newsletter
- Sponsor training programs, talks and presentations
- On-the-job meetings on health and safety issues

**Keep records.** An important job of the committee is to keep track of all injuries. Sometimes this is the only proof that there are hazards. Facts are needed to make changes.

**Do monthly inspections.** Make sure that both labour and management reps are present at every inspection. Workers in every area being inspected should be asked questions about safety and health hazards.

**Investigate all accidents and near misses.** A thorough investigation after the fact can uncover the cause of an accident and steps can be taken to prevent it from happening again. Obviously, safety improvements should be made before an accident or near miss happens.





[www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca)