

CORPORATE EXPOSURE: Components of Successful Safety Committees

Harry P. Mirijanian



Last month we discussed the importance of meeting state standards for mandated safety committees. This month, we offer the components necessary for a successful committee.

Essentially, successful safety committees have six simple components:

1. Management involvement, not management commitment. Too often, we encounter risk control professionals who suggest that the first step in any safety movement is to gain management's commitment. I know of no management that is not committed to safety and health issues. But management must also be involved. The most successful safety committees we have encountered are those where an officer of the company actively participates in the effort. Their personal involvement is what gives the committee respectability and proper empowerment.

2. Representation. Committee members must be truly motivated to recommend changes in the operation to improve safety and health conditions—not merely to satisfy some other personal agenda. Representatives should include individuals who can obtain input from all corners of the work force. Human resources representatives can be quite effective in helping the committee identify the best representatives.

3. Willingness to change. All too often we see evidence suggesting that the committee was established to satisfy a legal requirement or for accreditation

purposes. These committees are easy to spot; their members all complain that nothing gets corrected. The chair is often a low-level line manager, and sometimes committee members are forced to be on the committee almost as a condition of their employment.

To be effective, the company must be willing to empower the committee members to make the necessary changes. Though we can appreciate management's concern that change could be expensive, this has certainly not been our experience.

4. Accident information. The committee members must have accessibility to accident trending information. Without properly identifying the factors that contributed to the losses, the safety committee cannot be certain that it is properly addressing its attention to areas that would likely produce results. Accident details such as time of day, day of week, work activity being performed, and employees' and supervisors' experience levels are some of the statistics that should be presented to the committee members for analysis. A trucking consortium recently realized a majority of its fleet losses happened on Fridays. At first, the conclusion was that Fridays are hectic, with heavier delivery schedules and with many commuters rushing to start their weekends. On closer inspection, however, it became clear that the Friday losses were incurred primarily by the same group of drivers. The safety committee recommended changing the drivers' routing schedules, and Friday losses decreased significantly.

5. Publicity. The safety committee needs publicity if it is going to maintain its positive efforts. The committee's accomplishments should be broadcast throughout the organization. This will encourage others to bring issues to the group for discussion and review, possibly long before

the issues result in serious losses.

Publicity also helps demonstrate to the work force that things do change and, more important, that management does care. The safety committee should not be the company's best-kept secret. By providing the committee's meeting schedule well in advance (a 12-month agenda), the company gives employees the opportunity to adjust their schedules accordingly. One successful tactic for generating publicity at one firm was a series of customized posters. Working from the safety committee's recommendations, the company created posters showing photographs of incorrect and correct methods of performing certain functions. The posters were distributed throughout the company and were instrumental in its new training and education programs.

6. Outside assistance. Companies should not hesitate to engage the services of an outside professional to help formulate agendas for the safety committee. Your insurance broker, your carrier, or an outside independent consultant can provide this assistance. Having a set of eyes that is both independent and experienced helps keep the committee members focused on the issues. Naturally, choosing the source for outside assistance depends on several factors, and no single reference source is appropriate for all companies. The organization should realize that an effective outside consultant will need access to many of the facility's operating policies and procedures, as well as the historical background of the company to successfully integrate the committee. ■

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