

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES THAT WORK!

That Work!

Does your workplace
have a health and

safety committee?
How can your
committee be most

effective?
Read this fact sheet
to learn more!



Workers face many health and safety problems on the job. For example, there are toxic chemicals in workplaces, poor air quality, and machines that do not have safety guards. There are also problems around how work is organized. This can include not having enough people to do the work, long hours of work, and stress. Safety and health problems are called “hazards.”

A health and safety committee can help improve conditions on the job. An effective committee can get hazards corrected. It can also encourage union members to work together to make sure the workplace is safe.

There are two types of health and safety committees:

- **Local union health and safety committees**, made up of union members.
- **Joint labor-management health and safety committees**, made up of representatives from union and management.

**Both kinds of committees are important
in improving workplace health and safety.**

LOCAL UNION HEA

COMMITTEES

Local union health and safety committees are union-only committees. A union committee plays an important role in reducing the number of hazards at the workplace.

Members of a union health and safety committee are chosen by union officers or elected by the membership.



What does a local union health and safety committee do?

Identify, evaluate and suggest solutions for safety and health hazards:

- Do regular workplace inspections to identify hazards.
- Review information about injuries and accidents to find out what is hurting workers.
- Do a questionnaire that workers fill out to tell the committee about safety and health problems.
- Do body mapping and hazard mapping with workers.
- Decide which hazards need to be fixed right away.
- Suggest ways management can improve safety and health at the workplace.

Provide information and education:

- Train workers on how to identify and report unsafe conditions.
- Keep union members and leaders informed.
- Make sure there is a way for union members to communicate their concerns to the committee.
- Make sure management does not do anything to discourage workers from reporting injuries and illnesses.

Investigate accidents and injuries:

- Develop ways to report accidents, injuries and illnesses right away.
- Ask questions about what caused the problem and how it can be fixed.

Take action:

- Shut down an unsafe job until the hazard is fixed.

- Make sure management fixes health and safety problems.
- Check out workplace changes made by management to make sure the changes do not create more health and safety problems.
- File and follow-up on OSHA complaints.
- Prepare for joint labor-management health and safety committee meetings.

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Workers need to be effective?

To make sure that a union health and safety committee is effective, committee members need the following:

Paid time for activities:

- Union health and safety committee members should be paid for the time they spend on committee activities.
- The union can pay for this time. Even better, the union contract can give committee members the right to do committee work on employer-paid time.

Access to the workplace:

- Union health and safety committee members need to be able to go to all parts of the workplace. This allows them to speak with workers about health and safety concerns and to investigate accidents or injuries.

Resources:

- A basic library and Internet access can help members learn more about health and safety laws and hazards.
- A resource list of unions, labor education programs at colleges and universities, and COSH groups (Committees on Occupational Safety and Health) can help the

committee get ideas about how to solve health and safety problems.

Training:

- Union health and safety committee members need to get training about health and safety and about how to take action.
- Local unions can arrange this training through the international union, labor education programs at a university, or COSH groups.

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JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

Union contracts often set up health and safety committees that include representatives from both labor and management.



A joint health and safety committee gives the union a chance to talk with management about health and safety problems and to suggest how problems should be fixed.

What does a joint labor-management health and safety committee do?

A joint labor-management health and safety committee does many of the same things as the local union committee. The difference is that the union is doing these activities with management. The union's job in the joint committee is make sure management listens to workers' concerns and fixes health and safety problems.

Some of the activities that joint labor-management health and safety committees can do include:

- Review all health and safety information. This includes OSHA 300 injury and illness reports, complaints that have been filed, and results of workplace inspections.
- Investigate workplace accidents or “near misses” and any illnesses.
- Discuss ideas for changes that eliminate or help reduce hazards. •

Find out if health and safety changes have eliminated the problem.

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How effective is your joint labor-management committee?

The following ten questions will help workers and unions think about how effective your joint committee is.



(what it wants) to the committee and does the committee work on the union's issues?

QUESTIONS

1. Does the union bring its own “agenda”

2. Do union and management have equal numbers of members on the committee?

3. Does the union get to pick their members on the committee?
4. Do union committee members regularly meet separately from management to discuss union concerns and to plan for the joint meetings? **ANSWERS** yes no
 yes no
5. Do union and management share responsibility for setting meeting agendas and goals, chairing meetings, and taking action on specific issues? yes no
 yes no
6. Are union committee members paid their regular wages for meetings, inspections, and other committee activities? yes no
7. Can the committee make decisions and put them into effect? yes no
8. Can the committee make inspections of the workplace and shut down unsafe jobs? yes no
9. Does the committee have access to health and safety information kept by the employer (for example, injury and illness reports, test results of noise levels, list of chemical hazards at the workplace)? yes no
 yes no
10. Does the local union regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the committee? yes no

See how many “yes” answers you check.

Review your answers.

Review your answers. If you only have a few “yes” boxes marked, your joint committee is probably not very effective in getting health and safety problems fixed. The union members of the committee need to talk to one another about what changes are needed to make your joint committee more effective. They also need to talk to

management about what changes are needed. The union may decide to not participate in the joint committee if it is not effective.

These are the KEY points:

Health and safety committees can be either local union committees or joint labor-management

committees.

These committees can help identify and solve health and safety issues and hazards on the job.

Make sure your

joint labor management committee is really effective in correcting health and safety hazards.

