

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee Member's Guide



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The challenge

Congratulations on your appointment to the Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee. Those who selected you to work with this committee have recognized your ability to influence the conduct of others.

Your task is a challenging one. It is to encourage a constant awareness of the need for safe and competent work from all levels of the work force. It can be rewarding. The people you work with will appear to you in a new light. You will be playing an important part in the effort to reduce workplace injury and disease.

The reasons for incidents

Incidents *can be* prevented. They are not a matter of chance, they are *caused* — by people, and by the way people work. If you think back to any incident at work, to the situation, a split second before it happened, you will probably recall that something was wrong. That incident happened because of some defect or weakness in the way the work was being done, or in the equipment, or in other events going on nearby. If someone fell, there was something they tripped on, or something that broke under their weight because it was faulty, or there was some protective equipment left off the job that was supposed to prevent falls.

The deficiencies in equipment and behaviour are the reasons for incidents. If they are allowed to continue, it's just a matter of time until an incident happens. There is only one answer to incidents. It is to get rid of the defects in equipment and in work behaviour. Your task and role is to ensure that there is full recognition of defects in the workplace, and that people care enough to eliminate them.

Committee purpose

Day-to-day activities in committee work are explained in detail in the Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee Handbook (LI004) available from Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre. The handbook will guide you in dealing with most problems that arise in organizing your task, and it can be kept as a handy reference throughout your time on the committee. Before you look through the handbook, stop and think. Why is a committee needed? What is it supposed to accomplish? The main purpose of the committee is to ensure that all health and safety concerns are brought into the open and kept there, under the spotlight, until they have been resolved. That cannot be done without some kind of committee whose business is visible to, and accessible to, every person at the work site — that is, to workers, to supervisors, to managers, and to the employer.

Your committee is needed for the following reasons:

- you are accessible to workers who need action on their concerns and/or the health and safety problems they encounter at the worksite
- you are a competent and sympathetic person that workers feel they can discuss a concern with even if it turns out not to be hazardous or important
- your committee provides a discussion group where concerns will be discussed and a recorded statement made that action is, or is not, needed. The issues cannot simply be pushed aside without an answer.
- the minutes of your meetings provide a continuing record of what action is being taken, and when. Nobody responsible for corrective action can keep putting it off or wait for it to be forgotten.

If you are successful in getting concerns identified, and all of them properly answered, the effect on the workforce can be considerable. Safety will acquire a new level of importance. Workers will become less willing to tolerate poor work habits, untidy premises, short-cuts and slap-happy procedures. When people see that their work methods are important from a safety point of view, they will become important from every point of view. Health, safety, job satisfaction and morale — all will improve when the health and safety committee is successful.

The problem of keeping the workplace safe and healthy is a never-ending one. There is the constant threat of incidents that can result in injuries, damage or production stoppages. There is a constant need to keep up-to-date on new discoveries related to health hazards from the thousands of chemicals and new processes used at workplaces like yours. You and the other members of the Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee can provide the help needed.

For more information



http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_li004.pdf

Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee Handbook – LI004

Attitudes of a good committee member

As a committee member, try to adopt a relaxed, friendly manner, have an open mind and be persistent.

- *Always be ready to listen to the concerns of other workers*

Many hazards cannot be identified just by looking. You need to be told about them by other workers. So always be ready to discuss their concerns and encourage their participation in all aspects of safety.

- *Be sure you use safe work practices yourself, and obey all safety rules*

It is by your example, and that of supervisors, that people will believe good work habits are important.

- *Do not let anything pass that is unsafe*

If you choose to overlook any health and safety concern, you and the safety program will lose credibility.

Always take action. If you cannot expect an immediate answer from workers or a supervisor, tell the co-chair. If you are the co-chair, take the concern to the manager. If you cannot see it being resolved that way, be sure to bring it up at the next committee meeting.

- *Do not give up on any concern that is unresolved*

However long and difficult the answer, make sure it is found. Sometimes, when the concern is not a health and safety matter, the answer is “no action needed”. But where it involves poor work habits or procedures, make sure the crew is given an opportunity to get together and discuss the proper way of working. If the concern is difficult to identify or solve, make sure that efforts are continued until all facts have been obtained. Then try out ideas until a successful answer is found.

- *Do not become involved in matters that are not health and safety concerns*

Sometimes a concern is expressed about labour-management matters, or social events. Without being offensive, let the person know that you cannot take responsibility for matters that do not involve risks to health or likelihood of injury. Concerns like overtime schedules, parking privileges, and who pays for safety shoes are not safety problems. They are management or labour-management matters.

- *Do not exceed your authority*

Remember your responsibility is to identify concerns, and to enquire how and when they will be resolved. You are not there to order corrective action, you are there to recommend it. You are not there to take the blame for things that go uncorrected, or for incidents that may result. If you are to have any authority to interfere, such as shutting down an unsafe job, you must wait until the manager grants that authority and notifies the entire workforce of the powers you have been told to exercise on his behalf.

- *Do not interfere with equipment controls*

It is right to pick up tools or garbage that cause tripping or slipping hazards, but it is wrong to push switches, move hoists, or disconnect power tools that you think should not have been left the way you found them. Serious accidents can result from stopping, starting, or moving equipment. No matter whether you are a worker member of the committee, or the manager himself, do not operate or interfere with other people's equipment. Find out who is in charge and tell them what is wrong. If the equipment is extremely dangerous, leave someone to keep watch while you find the offending operator. The only time you should touch the controls of somebody else's equipment is a last-ditch attempt to avert a serious incident.

- *Get help in situations you don't understand*

Whenever a problem is beyond your understanding or confidence in handling, seek the help of other committee members or the co-chair. If further help is necessary, contact the Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre.

- *Incident prevention*

Because most incidents are caused by defects in attitudes and equipment, a big part of your job will be finding ways to remove these defects. Correcting faults in equipment and buildings is not usually difficult and the minimum standards you should aim for are found in Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and Code*. But changing people's attitudes is a difficult matter. These are special techniques you will need to use when dealing with the causes of unsafe behaviour or poor work attitudes. Consider the following:

- **Didn't know** — Have supervisors developed safe work procedures for every important job? Do operators know of these procedures? Are operators well trained? Are equipment manuals available? Are new workers given proper training and orientation? Is every unusual job explained and discussed before the crew starts?
- **Didn't care** — Are operators consulted during the design of job procedures? Do supervisors insist these procedures are always followed? Is equipment well maintained? Are premises clean, bright and well lit? Are operators made to feel responsible? In other words, do they think supervisors are there to help them work, or make them work? Do managers and supervisors observe safety rules and procedures? Do workers follow procedures?

- **Didn't think** — Do operators maintain good work habits? Is good housekeeping a habit? Is personal protective equipment always used? Is all machinery well guarded? Are switches and controls well located and free from accidental touching? Is there a foolproof lock-out procedure during maintenance? Do vehicles and hoists have adequate warning systems? Are there mirrors at blind corners? Are work areas away from the edge of steps or other hazards? Are dangerous projections brightly painted? Are sticks and ropes used instead of hands to control dangerous or heavy objects? What else will protect workers who may absent-mindedly get into danger?

Alberta Health and Safety Program

Resources and services are available in the following areas:

- The Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre provides safety bulletins, booklets, and advice on a variety of health and safety issues. The Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre can be reached toll-free by calling: Edmonton 780-415-8690 or throughout Alberta 1-866-415-8690.
- Occupational Health and Safety Officers enforce the province's workplace health and safety laws. They may investigate and act on complaints to check on compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulation and Code.

For more information

 www.worksaely.org

Excerpts from the Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee Handbook

Introduction

What is a Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee?

A joint work site health and safety committee (JWSHSC) is a group of worker and employer representatives working together to identify and solve health and safety problems at the work site. A JWSHSC is mandatory for any work site that is ordered to have a committee by the Minister. The formation of a JWSHSC for all other work sites is voluntary.

Purpose of the Handbook

The handbook describes procedures that have proved successful for resolving problems in joint work site health and safety committee activities.

Responsibilities of a Joint Work Site Health and Safety Committee

No worker, supervisor, manager, or employer can hold the committee responsible for unsafe or unhealthy situations. The committee is responsible for recommending how health and safety problems might be solved, not for carrying out the necessary remedial actions.

Ways of identifying hazards

Health hazards

Because health hazards seldom show an immediate injury, they are frequently overlooked by workers and employers alike. Committee members must make a special effort to learn how health is being affected by working conditions, and continually be on the lookout for harmful substances, vapours, noise, and unsafe work practices.

Daily concerns

Committee members should respond to any health and safety concern raised by a worker in the course of daily work. Members should then advise the worker that steps are being taken, and continue to keep the worker informed of actual progress.

Inspections

- *Regular inspections* — committee members should inspect the work site regularly. This provides an opportunity to speak with supervisors and workers to gain their help in identifying concerns that might otherwise be overlooked.
- *Carrying out the inspection* — the work site should be inspected several days prior to each meeting. Members need clipboards, schedules of what to inspect and a place to meet briefly to prepare the agenda for the upcoming meeting.
- *Handling the results* — not all concerns discovered during an inspection will necessarily be brought up at the meeting. Maintenance and housekeeping problems should be handled directly by management. The most serious remaining problems should go on the agenda. Anything that cannot be effectively handled before the next inspection should be carried over.
- *Incident reports* — as many incident reports as possible should be reviewed by the committee. The causes of incidents frequently reveal health and safety problems. These problems should then be resolved in the same way as any other concern identified by the committee.

Response to hazards

Maintenance problems

Where there is a defective condition, the supervisor should be notified. If not corrected in a reasonable period of time, the problem should be referred to the co-chairs.

Unsafe work habits

A member who sees an unsafe work habit should point out what is wrong. Supervisors should always support such action and back up committee members.

Difficult to solve hazards

Health and safety problems that have no standard solution but may require entirely new equipment, new procedures, or changes in design, should be referred to the co-chairs for action.

Conduct of meetings

Preparation

Co-chairs should ensure that every member receives an agenda prior to the day of the meeting, that the appropriate meeting room is made available, and that each member has arranged to attend.

Minutes

The minutes should be entered on a form, item by item, as the meeting progresses. It is not advisable to take notes and prepare the minutes after the meeting.

Review of previous business

List concerns resolved and concerns in progress without feeling it necessary to take minutes of their discussion. For each recommendation past target date, carefully re-examine the problem and discuss recommended actions and assign a new target date. Enter these in the minutes. Do the same with each recommendation where action was completed, but did not completely solve the original concern.

New concerns

Ensure each new concern is a valid health and safety matter. Take care that the problem is properly identified. Ensure the recommendation is a special action capable of completion within a definite period of time. Assign a realistic target date.

Incident review

Concerns arising from review of incidents can each be treated as an additional item under “New concerns”.

Training and education

A program of tool box meetings, job-procedure training and job education has a major beneficial effort on work habits. The committee should make every effort to establish and maintain such a program.

Special problems

Safety rules


Committee should accept responsibility for recommending safety rules and safe work practices.


Attitudes

Poor work attitudes are often responsible for unsafe acts — the cause of the majority of industrial incidents. A person's attitude towards work is greatly influenced by their environment and therefore can be changed.

Contact us:

Province-Wide Contact Centre

 Edmonton
(780) 415-8690

 Throughout Alberta
1-866-415-8690
(Toll Free)



Deaf or hearing impaired

- Edmonton (780) 427-9999

or

- Throughout Alberta
1-800-232-7215
(Toll Free)

Web Site



www.worksafely.org

Getting copies of *OHS Act*, Regulation & Code:

Queen's Printer



www.qp.gov.ab.ca



Edmonton (780) 427-4952

Workplace Health and Safety



<http://industry.alberta.ca/whs-ohs>

Call any Government of Alberta office toll-free
Dial 310-0000, then the area code and telephone number you want to reach

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