

**HEALTHFUL WORKPLACE**

Safety Committees

The why and how

by Ron Peters
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Safety committee effectiveness begins from within, where committee engagement is key. Administrative support and follow-through on committee decisions are also crucial to a safety committee's potential efficiency.

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Safety committees provide an important communications link, allowing management, supervisors and employees to share information and concerns related to safety. They provide essential monitoring, educational, investigative and creative tests, as well as help to build and maintain safety awareness within the city. When done right, city safety committees can greatly influence city safety programs and be an effective focal point for all safety activities.

Every city should have a written safety program that addresses the full scope of work that the city performs. A safety committee is the lifeblood of such programs, with the unique power to truly make them come alive. The problem is that many organizations will have a great written safety program that sits on the shelf, with some aspects of the program in play while other areas are left unaddressed.

After the need for a safety committee is determined, the challenge comes in establishing and keeping it as effective as possible. Safety committee effectiveness begins from within, where committee engagement is key. Administrative support and follow-through on committee decisions are also crucial to a safety committee's potential efficiency.

When the need for a safety committee is identified, goals should be set first. Members of the committee should come



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Municipal safety services, resources and training are a cornerstone of the [Florida Municipal Insurance Trust's Risk Control Department](#).

The FMIT offers its members a proactive approach to risk control through analysis, evaluation and action plan. Analysis methods include field surveys, technical assistance, safety analysis and loss analysis; evaluation provides a target focus; and an action plan is developed and implemented.

The [Matching Safety Grant Program](#) has given out 821 safety grants totaling \$1.7 million to members. Annually, the FMIT dedicates \$300,000 for the grant program.

The [SHIELD Academy](#), the FMIT's dedicated training arm, offers countless educational opportunities to its members, including in-person training, online training and a large video and DVD library. Thousands of videos are also available through FMIT partner Safety Center, Inc.

[EPL Assist](#), the FMIT's human resources and employment law assistance program, provides members with a wide variety of legal content, forms and analysis, as well as the ability to speak directly with Littler Mendelson's employment law experts.

The Florida Municipal Insurance Trust insures approximately 600 public entities. To learn more about the FMIT, contact Clay Austin, assistant director of trust services, at caustin@flcities.com.

from all areas of the organization. Upper management should determine the size of the committee, which is better kept small, and employers may have employees elect their representatives.

Before the first committee gathering, the rules and responsibilities should be clearly defined to members. All members of the organization should be informed of the names of committee members, who should then prepare to define the committee's purpose.

Empowering and engaging members of the committee is key to its success. In defining the safety committee's purpose, members hit the ground to assess the needs of the work group. This includes making systematic inspections and reporting conditions, reviewing past accidents and recommending corrective action, listening to fellow workers' suggestions, pursuing safety education through various forms of media, developing and revising rules to comply with safety and health standards, and discussing and reviewing the progress of the safety committee itself.

An active committee will be prepared to develop and make recommendations in a variety of areas. Member duties typically include conducting accident and hazard investigation and inspections, facilitating safety training, developing a city safety budget and conducting safety meetings. Tasks should be delegated equally to members so that the burden doesn't fall to the committee chair. This also creates a sense of ownership in the success of the committee for each member.

Committee meetings should start on time and should run less than one hour. The co-chairs, one selected from the general employees and the other from management, should take turns running and recording each meeting and the agenda should be followed. It helps to set meeting management ground rules. The authority of the committee should be firmly established and tasks should be clearly delegated to individuals or teams. It is always helpful to have refreshments available to keep everyone focused.

When a policy is established by the committee, it should be communicated to all levels in the city, including explanations about eliminating and reducing loss, why the committee is established, how it fits into the organization and what its authority, goals, objectives and needs for cooperation and contribution are. Accomplishing this task may take several meetings and it is crucial that top management lends visible support, including assistance with follow-through, where needed.

With continued enforcement of safety committee-recommended rules, support for decisions from management and strong committee member involvement, safety committees can ensure that accidents are prevented, claims stay down and that members of an organization enjoy safe and healthful workplaces. These results will also yield tremendous cost savings.

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