

Joint Health and Safety Committees

Workplaces with 20 or more regular employees must have a Joint Health and Safety Committee.

Role of the Committee

A Joint Health and Safety Committee is a committee made up of worker and employer representatives working together to identify and resolve health and safety problems in the workplace.

To be successful, the committee must operate in an atmosphere of cooperation and be effective in promoting and monitoring a sound occupational health and safety program. While the employer is ultimately responsible for the overall safety program, the committee is responsible for identifying and recommending solutions to problems. The individual worker has a responsibility to report problems to the supervisor or employer. However, if the problem is not corrected, a committee member should be contacted. The committee's role in the workplace includes:

- Promoting safe work practices
- Assisting in creating a safe and healthy workplace
- Recommending actions that will improve the effectiveness of the occupational health and safety program
- Promoting compliance with WCB Occupational Health and Safety Regulation

Organizing the Committee

The structure of a Joint Health and Safety Committee is outlined in the WCB OH&S Regulation.

Members should be selected according to the needs of the organization. All workers in the operation need to be represented. Committee policy should address:

- Term of office for members
- How alternates are designated
- What constitutes a quorum (the fixed minimum number of members that must be present to make a meeting valid)

Where should the committee representation come from?

- There should be no fewer than four regular members, employed at the operation and experienced in the types of work carried on at the operation.
- Membership should be chosen by and represent the workers and the employer. At least half the members must be worker representatives.

Committee Size

Factors to consider when deciding on committee size include:

- Degree of hazard in the workplace
- Number of employees

- Number of departments
- Number of places of employment
- Number of unions or worker groups
- Need to represent different shifts

The committee needs to be able to handle the needs of the organization and diversity of the work.

Selection of Members

The role of the committee is consultative. Duties are to review and recommend. It is important that members work in a cooperative manner to solve problems. People involved in union/management matters should leave any adversarial role behind if they become part of the health and safety committee.

Employer Representatives

Committee members can become frustrated and lose enthusiasm if the employer representatives do not have authority to follow up on most of the safety and health issues. The committee itself does not have the authority to act on its own recommendations. It is therefore vital that the employer representatives have sufficient authority to act upon many matters agreed upon at a meeting.

Worker Representatives

Worker representatives must be chosen by and represent the workers. This is sometimes done according to the constitution of the union representing the workers. Worker representatives should be chosen to effectively represent all workers on all shifts and departments; therefore, committee members should be chosen from different areas within the organization.

Use of Alternates

Alternate members should be selected to attend meetings or conduct committee business when regular members are not available. It is a good idea to have the alternate selected in advance.

Co-Chairs

The two co-chairs must have leadership qualities and the confidence of the members. One co-chair should be selected by the worker representatives of the committee. Another co-chair should be selected by the employer representatives of the committee. The co-chairs' major responsibilities are to:

- Control meetings
- Maintain an unbiased viewpoint
- Review previous meeting reports and material
- Prepare the agenda
- Record the committee activities
- Circulate and post the meeting reports
- Send out meeting notices

It is desirable for the employer to provide typing and clerical services. It is also acceptable for the employer to provide a recording secretary who would not necessarily be considered a committee member.

For More Information ...

For more information about health and safety committees, see the [Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committee](#) workbook. If you are in the process of setting up a Joint Health and Safety Committee in your workplace, **Appendix 1, Sample Employer Checklist #1: How to Set Up a Joint Health and Safety Committee**, will be especially useful.