

The Ultimate Guide to Audit and Inspection Programs (Part 3)

Safety Committee Meetings

- Overall EHS program function and effectiveness
- EHS program efficiency
- Safety team roles and responsibilities
- Current priorities and improvements to make
- Timetables for implementing changes
- EHS program budget and costs

Examples of questions safety committees should consider:

- Are all employees working as safely and efficiently as possible?
- Are all members of the organization, including leadership, engaged and represented in EHS program decisions?
- What safety and regulatory risks does the organization currently face?
- What aspects of the organization's EHS program are functioning as intended?
- Are there any gaps in the program?
- What needs to be improved?
- How soon will changes be made?
- What are the costs of improvements?
- What is the ROI of an optimized safety program?
- Who is responsible for coordinating EHS program changes?
- What will the schedule be for inspections and audits moving forward?

You're feeling pretty accomplished. You've conducted a comprehensive regulatory audit as well as a rigorous facility inspection, and nailed down your accident investigation procedures.

But your work isn't quite finished yet.

Audits and investigations can't happen within a vacuum.

The risks and inefficiencies they uncover need to be addressed. To keep people safe, healthy, and out of trouble, the organization needs to commit to creating real change in the workplace.

This is where your safety committee comes in. The safety committee brings audit and inspection findings into focus so leadership can begin making decisions.

Following their walkarounds, checklists, and observations, the auditing party shares their results with the committee. Members then convene to determine the organization's next course of action, prioritize improvements, and assign people to make changes.

1. Recruit the Right Safety Committee Members

Choose safety committee members wisely. A safety committee needs advocates at all levels throughout the organization, including leadership. There will likely be decisions to make about resources or financial support—and those decisions can only happen with senior management's approval and input.

In addition to senior managers, your committee should also include department managers, your HR manager, and one or more key employees from each department. All committee members should be aligned on goals and share a commitment to employee health and safety.

Be careful with how you form your safety committee. Depending on the state or states in which you operate, you may have certain rules to abide by in terms of the committee's function, as well as employee involvement and representation within the committee. Some states require quarterly safety meetings while others don't—so be sure of the rules in your area.

2. Get Organized

Well-organized documentation is a must. Don't neglect your paperwork and reporting. It may seem like extra effort, but it cements the foundation for a functional health and safety program—one that stays ahead of issues and improves over time.

First, state the safety committee's purpose, then document bylaws, responsibilities, procedures, and goals. These should include a standard agenda the committee will follow during each meeting, as well as specific activities that will happen monthly, quarterly, and/or annually, along with the person responsible for each activity.

Also, determine how long committee members will serve. You might want to consider staggering members' terms to ensure continuity when new people join and exit.

3. Plan Each Meeting Ahead of Time

Effective committees don't simply happen. They're the result of continuous planning. Ideally, it works like a cycle. The committee identifies the purpose of each meeting, and determines whether it can be met within that meeting's timeframe. If not, the item gets pushed to the next meeting, and the process repeats.

Every meeting should have a detailed agenda identifying topics and which members can share knowledge about those topics. This can help you determine when you might need to bring in a subject matter expert.

Whenever possible, distribute the agenda to committee members in advance. This not only ensures people come prepared to discuss topics, but also keeps the meeting flowing smoothly and on track.

4. Assign Responsibilities

The key to an effective safety committee is accountability. Every committee member has a responsibility to the organization and their co-workers to improve the workplace's safety and health program, culture, and outcomes.

Many safety committees fall short by not being consistent and specific with accountability. When you identify an action item, make sure to put someone's name next to it. It shouldn't always be the chairperson or your safety manager. Every member who's a part of the committee is able and should be willing to execute on their shared responsibility.

Concluded.

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**Published by : D. L. Shah Trust,
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