

Before you begin:

Review your organization's OSHA 300 log, workers' compensation claims, and other accident/incident reports to get an idea of what issues the safety team may need to address.



Introduction

A safety team can be an important element in an organization's safety and health process. To be effective, safety teams should have the following elements in place:

- Management commitment
- Team members with assigned roles
- Team skills
- Meeting management tools
- Communication strategies
- Evaluation methods

Definitions

- **Team charter** – a document that outlines the team’s purpose, members, roles, boundaries, and meeting times
- **SMART goals** – desired results that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely

Discussion

Management commitment

In forming a safety team, management can provide support by:

- Establishing a budget
- Suggesting the frequency of meetings
- Establishing the team function within the organization
- Identifying a team sponsor from senior management
- Providing the support, time and resources needed for the team to be successful

Team members with assigned roles

In developing a team, it is important to have representatives from both the hourly and salaried ranks. Depending on an organization’s structure, representation from each department allows opportunities for employee involvement, buy-in for decisions and diverse perspectives. Team members may either be volunteers or persons selected by their departments.

Team roles should be defined to involve the team members and to delegate tasks. Key team roles include a facilitator, timekeeper, scribe, and team leader.

A purpose with defined goals and strategies

A key requirement of an effective team is that all members share in and are committed to the same purpose. Having alignment on purpose means the group members are committed to the direction and outcome of the group.

One of the first action items the team should do is develop a charter, which outlines the team’s purpose, member roles and expectations, team structure, and the team’s responsibilities to the organization.

Some of the functions of a team may include:

- Developing a yearly health and safety action plan, including goals and processes to track the elements in the plan
- Conducting periodic health and safety inspections to identify and correct physical conditions and unsafe work practices and procedures
- Reviewing or investigating accidents, injuries, and near misses and recommending corrective actions
- Coordinating and/or conducting health and safety training
- Developing health and safety procedures and policies
- Providing representation from various departments concerning health and safety issues

Team skills

Safety team members should share a common knowledge base with technical training such as OSHA standards or ergonomics as well as having problem solving and decision-making skills.

Meeting management tools

Managing the meeting before, during, and after is critical in a team’s effectiveness. By starting and ending meetings on time, facilitating the discussion, documenting the minutes, and providing an agenda, the team can stay focused on the meeting’s purpose and goals.

Communication strategies

Teams can significantly improve results by developing communication strategies. Communication should be provided throughout the team development stages and during the team’s existence. Examples of communication include the team charter, meeting minutes, agendas, and intranet sites.

Evaluation methods

Evaluations provide an opportunity to identify the team’s strengths and weaknesses and allow the opportunity to make changes. During the development stage, the team should have developed SMART goals which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. One method of evaluation of the team’s progress is whether they met their goals. Another method is to evaluate the actual team meetings and their effectiveness.

Conclusion

There is no one way to develop a safety team, but there are common elements to help ensure success. Whether you are just starting a team or have one in place but are looking to improve upon it, these elements can serve as a guide to make your team become more effective.

Group Activity

- Develop a team purpose which should describe why the team is meeting. For example, complete the following statement, "We exist to _____."
- Develop SMART goals which help achieve the team's purpose

Resources

[BWC Learning Center](#), search for: Effective Safety Teams

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, [Sample safety committee functions with objectives and duties](#)

Oregon OSHA, [Safety committee resource guide](#) provides several sample templates