

The Secret to Effective Safety Committees

The Second R: Responsibilities

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Last week, in Part 1 of the series, Gary examined the first of the four R's that form the secret of making safety committees successful: Representation/Rightsizing. He explained how to determine the right size of a committee and decide who should serve on it. This week, Gary focuses on the second R: Responsibilities of committee members. There's also a Checklist of the 6 Commandments of Committee Members in Tools.



Gary A. Higbee

Defining the Committee's Role

You need to spell out specifically what you expect your safety committee to do. New committees shouldn't try to do much too fast. They should probably start out with limited roles like:

- Investigating accidents and near misses; and
- Responding to employee complaints.

Although these are reactive functions, they give the committee a chance to learn the ropes and develop the experience necessary to take on more proactive roles like:

- Safety training;
- Lockout procedure development and auditing;
- Inspections;
- New process and equipment review;
- Ergonomics training and process evaluation;
- Promotion of health and safety at home; and
- Observation safety training audits.

Defining Committee Member Responsibilities

You also need to let committee members know what their responsibilities are. From working with committees, I have found that it helps to have company and labor representatives work together to develop job descriptions for committee members. *Advice* : If you're just starting a committee, keep the job description simple and straightforward. You can always expand it later.

Training Committee Members

You also need to train committee members so they can perform their responsibilities. This may involve something simple like safety talks or something more involved like comprehensive workshops. But here's an important caveat: I have never seen a committee capable of performing all newly learned functions well. You're better off limiting training to the duties to which the committee is committed. This will give committee members a chance to find their legs--that is, apply their new skills and improve their performance through practice and repetition.

As members get better and more comfortable in their role, you can train them to take on more difficult functions and assignments.

Editor's Note: Next week, in Part 3 of this series, Gary discusses the third R of committee success: Rotation