

The Fourth R: Results May 19, 2005

The Importance of Results

Committees don't get a free pass just because they serve a noble cause. A committee is like any other part of an organization: It needs to produce results to justify its existence. There have to be successes backing up its work.

Sound Recommendations

To be successful, safety committees must ensure that the recommendations they make are responsible. In other words, recommendations should be:

- Limited to the safety realm;
- Well thought out; and
- Prioritized.

All recommendations should be backed by solid business justification and fit the company's business model and resource constraints. Committee members should be prepared to work with the safety and engineering departments both in the recommendation preparation and implementation process. Recommendations should consider business values like productivity, quality and cost-containment as well as pure safety.

Conversely, the committee should steer clear of outlandish recommendations that don't fit business reality. Such recommendations won't get taken seriously and will only harm the committee's credibility.

By the same token, management needs to understand the need to take committee recommendations seriously. Continually ignoring recommendations will undermine the committee and render it ineffective.

Building Support for Committee Work

Both management and the committee should make an effort to promote awareness throughout the organization of the committee's efforts and successes. Visibility fosters the kind of grass roots support that enhances a committee's effectiveness. In Canada, the provincial OHS laws require employers to post in a conspicuous place the minutes of at least the last committee meeting. U.S. employers would be well advised to do the same because it keeps workers notified of the committee's work.

The minutes are important because they show what the committee has achieved and what it's working on. This reassures people that the committee is active and enables them to track initiatives from start to finish. When management supports committee initiatives, this gets reflected in the minutes. So posting the minutes provides evidence of management's commitment to health and safety.

Conclusion

Effective safety committees can make an important contribution to the health and safety of the workplace. Ineffective safety committees can be a colossal waste of time, money and effort. Each workplace is different and there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all formula. But based on my experience, if you stay true to the principles of the four R's--no matter how big your workplace or what industry it's in--you'll give your committee a fighting chance to succeed.

Recap of the Four R's

- 1. Representation:** Making sure the committee is the right size.
- 2. Responsibilities:** Assigning committee members appropriate duties.
- 3. Rotation:** Keeping the right mix of fresh faces and veteran leadership.
- 4. Results:** Making realistic recommendations and publicizing committee work.

Editor's Note: *You can get any and all of the previous installments of this series from the SafetyXChange archives.*



Gary A. Higbee

Editor's Note: Next week, in the final article of the series, Gary discusses the fourth R of committee success: Results.