



GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE SAFETY MEETINGS

A guide to planning and delivering high quality safety meetings, and implementing successful meeting follow-up.

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Introduction

A meeting is the act or process of two or more people coming together to discuss issues or events and coming to a consensus. A meeting can also be defined as a gathering to provide information.

The main purpose of a meeting is to discuss issues, provide information, and to form consensus around common issues. Meetings are designed to do the following:

- To engage in meaningful discussions in order to reach a decision
- To learn new things or acquire new skills
- Share ideas and meet new people
- To generate new ideas and come up with new ways of thinking

Types of Meetings

There are several types of safety meetings that organizations are engaged in on a regular basis.

Organizations should make efforts to include all types in their operations and encourage employees to be involved and aware of the various meetings and their outcomes.

A **Safety Committee Meeting** is a regularly scheduled meeting of safety committee members. Safety committee meetings can be used to discuss issues that have been brought to the attention of committee members, review incidents, and make recommendations to prevent future occurrences.

Safety Training is a formal training on a specific subject, such as confined space entry, respiratory protection, hazard communication/right-to-know, etc. This training is usually required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and generally has to include specific information. This training is done in a formal setting with a structured presentation.

A **Toolbox Talk or tailgate meeting** is an informal group discussion that focuses on a particular safety issue. These meetings are not as long as formal training and should last approximately 5 to 15 minutes.

A **safety brief** is a brief discussion of safety issues and other relevant topics, held at the beginning of a meeting, seminar, training or other event to heighten safety awareness. (e.g., identifying location of emergency exits and locations of severe weather shelters etc.).

Management level safety meetings are meetings with management regarding safety-related issues. They can be held for a variety of reasons, including: To obtain buy-in from management (particularly upper or senior management) on a new safety initiative, to review safety goals and objectives, policy, or program; to discuss how the organization and its various divisions are doing with their safety and injury prevention efforts; to discuss major incidents, and corrective actions that were taken to prevent reoccurrence.

New Employee Orientation is a meeting where new employees are introduced to the organization, and typically learn about its culture, mission, vision, policies, and values. Safety information and safe work performance expectations **should be discussed** during new employee orientation.

What Makes a Safety Meeting Effective?

Have an Agenda

An agenda is the foundation of your meeting. Without a clear purpose, the meeting can be perceived as a waste of time. A detailed agenda provides the path for your meeting to follow, and will allow you to focus on achieving specific outcomes. Consider the following questions when creating your agenda:

- Do you want a decision?
- Do you want to generate ideas?
- Are you reviewing status reports? Audits?
- Are you communicating something, like a policy or training?
- Are you planning something?

In advance of the meeting, develop an agenda with clear objectives. If possible, provide the agenda to participants well in advance of your meeting. If you're conducting an employee training where it doesn't make sense to send an agenda to participants, review the objectives at the start of the training.

Include the Right People

If you're planning a meeting where agreement on an issue or key decisions need to be made, make sure the participants that can make those decisions will be there. Not having the right people present can lead to a meeting without results. Review the list of attendees in light of your objectives, and make sure you have the right people included. Seek to minimize the number of people at your meeting to the minimum necessary to accomplish your objectives—this will help keep the meeting focused on your purpose.

Manage the Time

Begin meetings on time; don't make others wait for those who are late. Consider this: if you have eight people waiting fifteen minutes for someone who's late, they've wasted two hours of productive time. Do not start your meeting over if late participants arrive.

If you are conducting a longer meeting or training, make sure to plan for breaks on your agenda so participants can use the restroom, check e-mail, make calls, etc. Managing the time will keep your meeting focused and on-track. The leader should watch the clock and manage the discussion accordingly to end the meeting on schedule—this demonstrates respect for others' time. It can be helpful to allocate a set amount of discussion time for each item on your agenda.

Manage "Off Topic" Discussions

Meetings can be hijacked and derailed by off topic discussions outside the scope of the agenda. To keep your meeting on track:

- Focus discussion on the agenda items and stay within the scope
- Keep the agenda in front of you as a guide
- Review each item on the agenda
- Monitor the discussion

When the discussion veers in a direction unrelated to the agenda, tell participants this item will be added to the “parking lot” and then make a note to include in the meeting notes for follow-up. This will keep your meeting focused while allowing you to recognize other important points.

Take Notes

Take notes during the meeting so you have a record of the discussion, questions, decisions, and assignments directed to you and others. Use a copy of the agenda to add your notes under the key points. If you are the facilitator, use these notes to develop and send out meeting minutes to the group.

Closing the Meeting

Summarize the decisions, action plan, and who is responsible for each item and get agreement from the group. Effective follow-up is much more likely when people publicly agree to take a specific action.

Follow-Up & Sharing Information

Information sharing and action item follow-up are important to the success of safety meetings. The following are tips for sharing information discussed in meetings and follow-up.

- Meeting Minutes Tips (collected as needed for the type of meeting):
 - Distribute meeting minutes that are short and to the point, but capture the relevant information shared during the meeting.
 - Distribute meeting minutes to members and leadership within a short timeframe – say 24 hours.
 - Let all staff know what the committee is working on. Publicize the successes – focus on the positive! Minutes can be distributed in a variety of ways including:
 - Email (but don’t forget about employees with no computer access)
 - Employee Bulletin Board
 - Intranet Site
 - Agency Bulletin
- Follow-up Tips (when action is needed)
 - After discussion is completed on a topic – stop and do the following:
 - Agree on next steps to be taken
 - Establish the specific action items to be completed
 - Designate responsible person(s) to verify action item is completed
 - Establish a reasonable timeline for completion
 - Action item status review – review assignments during each meeting and discuss status.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Safety Committees

Frequency of Meetings

Safety committees are expected to meet regularly. The AFSCME and MAPE contracts specify that the committee meets quarterly. Employee safety concerns are better addressed and resolved if the committee meets frequently. It is highly recommended to schedule monthly safety meetings. Agencies(s) having multiple locations can organize joint meetings amongst their locations, and communicate via Web-Ex, or other virtual platforms. Generally, safety committees meeting frequently have the advantage of addressing safety concerns more promptly. It is recommended that safety committee meetings be scheduled at least six months in advance; and the meetings be scheduled at the designated time and place (e.g., first Monday of the month or quarter and in the same room).

Encourage all members or their substitute (same union/employee group) to attend all scheduled safety meetings.

Meeting Agenda

Each safety committee member is expected to be an active participant in the meeting. The agenda should be prepared and distributed a week in advance of each scheduled meeting. Each safety committee meeting should follow a standard agenda for each meeting. Member roll call may be conducted at the beginning of every meeting, followed by the approval of meeting minutes from the previous meeting.

The AFSCME recommended format of the agenda is expected to have:

- *Name of the organization*
- *Name of meeting*
- *Room number, date and time of the meeting*
- *Agenda items listed*
- *Review of:*
 - *Reports of personal injuries and illnesses*
 - *Accident investigations*
 - *Property damage*
 - *Alleged hazardous working conditions*
- *Follow-up on action items from previous safety committee meetings*
- *Update on walk-around inspections conducted by:*
 - *Safety Committee*
 - *Agency EHS personnel*
 - *Contract EHS personnel*
 - *Others*
- *Update on building security issues*
- *Status of employee safety training*

Other Member Assignments

Ensure meeting minutes are recorded effectively by the designated person. A specific time period (10 or 15 minutes) should be assigned to each agenda item and a timekeeper role may be assigned to a team member.

Meeting Minutes

The safety committee is expected to generate meeting minutes after the meeting and approved minutes are to be distributed to the designated audience.

Duties and Responsibilities

The committee should develop an advance schedule of meetings. The committee meeting should be conducted cordially while strictly observing the start and stop time. The committee is expected to ensure that meetings take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and commitment to health and safety. Meetings should not be used as a forum for airing general complaints and grievances.

Code of Conduct

Committee members should avoid raising or addressing miscellaneous union, personnel or personal issues at the safety meetings. The safety committee may develop and monitor specific safety program goals.

Meeting Preparation

If the meeting is conducted jointly with other locations, ensure all technology components are functional:

- Arrive early before the scheduled meeting time to test all communications and electronic equipment
- Resolve equipment issues before the meeting

Meeting space:

- Ensure all safety committee members are informed about the meeting location

Know the material:

- Identify issues that need to be addressed from the agenda
- Ensure safety committee chairperson or members know about the identified issues, or there are resources available to relay the information.
- Ensure the room is appropriately sized and set-up to facilitate group communication.
 - If budget permits, have some refreshments and coffee.
 - Create a poster for setting and establishing ground rules for safety committee meetings. Ensure the poster is displayed during meetings.
 - Allocate at least five minutes for each committee member to discuss/ comment on every topic.
 - Ensure that one person or sub-group does not always get their way or excessive influence over decisions.
 - Avoid interrupting or laughing at others while they are speaking.
 - Avoid using foul language or inappropriate humor.

- Avoid offensive gestures, such as rolling eyes, when other members are speaking or presenting an opinion.

Appendix B: Resources

The following links provide useful resources and guidance for developing safety meeting content:

Safety Committees

- [Workplace Safety Consultation – Labor-Management Safety Committee Program \(MN OSHA\)](#)
- [Effective Safety Committees](#)
- [7 Tips For An Effective Workplace Safety Committee](#)
- https://apps.sfmic.com/res_cat_doc/comptalk_safety_committees.pdf?t=1522437293278 (SFM)
- <https://ehs.utexas.edu/programs/safety/documents/SafetyCommittee-BestPractices.pdf>
- http://www.worksafemt.com/media/Best_Practices_For_Workplace_Safety_Committees.pdf

Safety Training

- [Resource for Development and Delivery of Training to Workers](#) (from OSHA)
- [Harvard Environmental Health and Safety Toolbox Talks](#)

Safety “Toolbox” Meetings

- [Wyoming Department of Workforce Services Toolbox Topics](#)
- [Setting Up a Tailgate/Toolbox Safety Meeting](#) (from California OSHA)