

## **FORMING A DISTRICT-WIDE SAFETY COMMITTEE**

### **Introduction**

Forming a school safety committee can be a daunting task, especially for those that have never been involved with a safety committee in the past. Selecting the right people, setting goals, delegating tasks and keeping the committee interesting are just some of the problems you may face as you start your safety committee.

This is just a brief summary of answers to common questions designed to assist you as you begin the formation of your safety committee. As always, the JIF Safety Coordinator is available to assist you in any way necessary to ensure the success of your committee.

### **How big should it be?**

There is no right or wrong answer to this question. The committee needs to be large enough to have proper representation and allow it to function properly, but small enough that it does not become too cumbersome to manage. Obviously, we would expect larger school districts to have more representatives than a smaller district.

While there are guidelines to an approximate number of members on a safety committee, the district should ensure that all major departments are represented. On average, a 100 employee district would likely have 3 to 7 members. A district with 100-300 employees would have 5 to 7 members and districts with over 300 employees would have between 7 and 9 members. You can certainly function with more, but be careful to keep the numbers manageable.

### **Who should I select to be on the committee?**

The most important and time-consuming task you will face while implementing a safety committee is the selection of the “right” people. Nothing can destroy a safety committee faster than chronic complainers. While members would ideally volunteer, there are certain job categories that virtually mandate representation. Always ask for volunteers from each department first, before mandating participation. This will minimize resentment.

The committee should have representatives from major departments such as administration, instructional, transportation, food service and support staff. At least one school nurse should be on the committee. You may further break down representation to include a principal/vice-principal, science teacher (especially in a high school environment), athletic director/physical education teacher, special education teacher, aide/para-professional and clerical employee.

Many districts ask if a representative from outside service vendors, such as custodial and food service companies, should be on the committee. The short answer is-Yes. While their staff are not district employees, their actions can promote or detract from a safe working environment and impact district safety goals. Some districts also request periodic representation from outside organizations such as the



police, fire and emergency management departments. You may also benefit from a Board representative and a PTA/PTO representative. In most cases, it is necessary to have a business office representative on the committee because at some point there will be expenditures for committee activities. Your Risk Management Consultant can play a vital role on the committee and provide guidance in many issues related to accident prevention, loss history and insurance-related questions.

Spend the time necessary to select people that you feel share the same goals and philosophy that you are attempting to achieve with the committee. You want dedicated employees that understand the importance of a safe and healthy working and learning environment. You should also attempt to achieve a good balance of administrative-level employees to staff on the committee. You may also try to include representatives from individual schools to encompass as much of the district facilities as possible.

### **I made my selections, now what?**

Set up a time for your first meeting. The first meeting will normally be to familiarize everyone with the committee members, set a year long meeting schedule, review the committee mission statement, select committee officers and determine the goals of the committee.

When setting the schedule of meetings, it is suggested that the committee meet at least monthly for the first 3 months. At the third meeting, determine if you should keep on a monthly schedule or go to a less frequent schedule. The committee should meet at least every three months, at a minimum.

It is suggested that the yearly schedule be established and distributed to all members. This schedule should not change unless there is an extraordinary reason to alter the dates and times. This emphasizes the importance of the meetings to all members. It is also the reason the committee should be large enough that it can operate smoothly, even if a few members are not present. Always prepare an agenda and provide it to all committee members about a week prior to the meeting. This will give members a chance to review what they want to discuss and help ensure productive meetings.

At the first meeting, the committee members should select a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary. The chair or vice-chair will run the meeting and help set the agenda. The secretary will take the minutes and ensure the minutes are distributed in a timely manner.

The committee should then determine what the short and long term goals should be.

### **How do I know what goals to set?**

Obviously, the goal of every safety committee is to reduce injuries, illnesses and property damage in the workplace. But, how you achieve those goals over time is the key to the success of the committee. Every district is unique in the areas that they feel need to be addressed. Just remember that the purpose of the committee is not to come in and complain about things that are wrong, but to review the overall operations and suggest solutions to improve safety.



Start by reviewing loss records for the last three years. This may include insurance loss runs, OSHA Injury and Illness Logs, Incident Reports and school nurse logs. This information will assist in determining where losses are occurring and areas that may need attention. Look for frequency of injuries, severity of injuries, repetitive loss problems and near miss incidents that may indicate a pattern of loss.

Use the resources of the committee to suggest areas that could be improved and how to work towards that goal. This may include revising or implementing policy changes, additional training for staff, altering and improving facilities, increasing safety awareness among staff and students, etc.

Determine what goals can be accomplished in the short-term and what goals are long-term. Devise a plan to accomplish those goals with a tentative time frame. Assign and delegate responsibilities to the committee members with the expectation they will report back to the committee at the next meeting. Make sure the minutes accurately reflect assignments for each member. Distribute the minutes to all members within a week of the meeting.

### **I am concerned my committee will fail, how do I prevent this?**

Safety committees fail for many reasons, but in most cases it comes back to the lack of a defined set of goals. If the committee has a goal and purpose and the members are dedicated, there is no reason that you should not succeed.

A good safety committee constantly reviews and revises its goals and mission to meet the changing needs of the district. Make sure you establish both short and long term goals and learn to accept small victories. Trying to “bite off” too much can overwhelm committee members and lead to resentment. Keep your goals realistic and achievable. The committee must be flexible and willing to revise its mission when necessary.

Do not allow the committee to get sidetracked by complainers. If you have one or two members that are monopolizing the committee’s time on matters that are not pertinent to the goals, the chairperson needs to step in and re-focus everyone on the relevant tasks. Make sure you promote the activities of the committee. Post the minutes on employee bulletin boards or e-mail them to all staff.

Provide a copy of the minutes to the Board for inclusion in the Board meeting minutes. Maintain administration support and solicit involvement from all employees. Make sure all employees know who their department/building representative is on the committee. If employees have a complaint or concern, make sure it is addressed in a timely manner.

### **What else can my committee do?**

Your safety committee can assist in reviewing and implementing safety policies. Members can review written safety programs, suggest or provide safety training, perform safety inspections and assist with accident investigations. The committee can help promote safety to staff and students, review losses and communicate new safety regulations. The committee is a dynamic collection of experienced individuals that has limitless potential to aid the district in promoting a safe environment.



### **Anything else I need to know?**

Your committee will continue to evolve as time goes on. Keep ideas fresh, continually evaluate goals and successes and maintain open lines of communication to all levels. Consider rotating committee members every year or two in order to involve more employees and get new ideas and perspectives. Make members accountable for their responsibilities, but also recognize them for their hard work and dedication. And finally, MAKE IT FUN! While safety is serious, it does not have to be boring. Find unique ways to get your message across in a non-threatening manner.

**GOOD LUCK!**

John W. Geitz, Safety Director

