

Health and Safety Committees

Health and Safety Committee - Effective and Efficient

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Are health and safety committee members' duties clearly defined?

The following list of duties is a general list of the types of activities a committee may perform. The actual legal requirements and duties of committees are defined in occupational health and safety legislation. These requirements vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Always confirm with your jurisdiction for requirements. In addition, specific duties may vary with the type and size of the organization, industry, number of safety specialist staff in the organization, the firm's incident experience, and the number of committees present.

Common duties may include:

- Attending all committee meetings.
- Promoting the [health and safety policy and program](#).
- Assisting the employer in resolving worker health and safety issues.
- Providing feedback on workers' suggestions.
- Promoting and monitoring compliance with health and safety regulations.
- Attempting to raise health and safety standards above legal requirements.

- Accompanying a worker during the resolution of work refusals.
- Assisting in the education and training of workers.
- Participating in or making recommendations about the identification and [control](#) of workplace hazards.
- Participating in assessments or making recommendations towards the development of control programs for hazardous products.
- Participating in [incident](#) investigations, where required or appropriate.
- Studying safety programs of other companies to enhance their own program.
- Conducting health and safety education or training programs.
- Making health and safety recommendations.
- Carrying out workplace [inspections](#).
- Making recommendations about [personal protective equipment](#).
- Making recommendations regarding monitoring the effectiveness of the health and safety program.
- Assisting in the development of organizational health and safety rules.
- Assisting in the development of safe work procedures.
- Initiating other activities as indicated by an incident experience.

Please refer to the following OSH Answers documents for more information about health and safety committees:

- [Health and Safety Committee – What is a Health and Safety Committee](#)
- [Health and Safety Committee – Creation](#)
- [Health and Safety Committee – Measuring Effectiveness](#)
- [Health and Safety Committee – Structure of Meetings](#)

Is a list of duties available to each member?

Once the duties of the health and safety committee have been decided, they should be documented in writing. This written document, often called a terms of reference, should be posted in the workplace and given to each committee member. Having the duties in writing helps members review their responsibilities, can be used to train new members, and can serve as an information resource for all workers.

Who develops the terms of reference?

A term of reference is typically developed by the employer and the health and safety committee. The terms of reference should ensure:

- compliance with legislation,
- effectiveness of the committee in meeting workplace-specific needs,
- widest possible worker involvement, and
- provision of resources such as worker time, money, equipment and facilities, for the functioning of the committee.

Review of the terms of reference should occur periodically to identify the necessary changes needed to improve the committee's performance.

Adapted from: CCOHS [Health and Safety Committees Guide](#).

Do members understand what their duties are?

A list of duties in itself cannot be relied upon to ensure that each committee member understands what is required of them. The list of duties should be discussed, either individually or in committee, and each member's understanding ensured.

Do members carry out their duties?

A well-structured health and safety committee with a clear purpose, and one that is composed of knowledgeable members who are fully aware of their responsibilities, will still be ineffective if the committee does not carry out its duties. There may be other reasons for the lack of committee effectiveness, but if the issue is internal to the committee, it should be within its power to rectify it. Generally, most people are dedicated to safety, but conflicts of interest, personality, or pressure of external priorities may impose constraints. These situations should be resolved as soon as they become evident to enable the committee to concentrate on its prime objective – health and safety.

Are the structure and duties reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?

The structure of the committee and its duties should be periodically reviewed to see that it is appropriately organized to fulfill its role. A review might be necessary when organizational changes or major physical changes have occurred in the workplace. Since a number of minor changes may take place over time, it may be a good idea to review the responsibilities and duties at set intervals.

Do members know the extent of their authority?

Each member should know the scope of their authority in dealing with safety matters. The written statement of authority should be reviewed with each committee member, and their understanding of it should be confirmed. Following a revision of duties, a review of the committee's authority should be made to ensure that an appropriate match still exists. Such a review may be necessary when the committee is unable to carry out a specific task due to a lack of authority or when committee members are perceived as regularly exceeding their authority.

Do members exceed their authority?

Members of the health and safety committee may exceed their authority in carrying out their duties, mainly because of the following two reasons:

- 1) There is a misunderstanding between their stated responsibilities and level of authority, or
- 2) There is no clear set of guidelines to follow.

In both cases, a review of the member's duties is necessary. Where one individual is found to exceed their authority regularly, the duties should be reviewed with them and their subsequent performance monitored. A procedure for recommending the dismissal of individual members might be considered in the terms of reference for the committee.

Are the chairperson's duties and authority clearly specified?

The committee chairpersons (co-chairs) should assume extra responsibilities. A decision should be made whether these responsibilities are shared all the time or taken in turn (in some jurisdictions, the method of chairing meetings is legislated).

Specific co-chair duties may include:

- Scheduling meetings and notifying members.
- Preparing an agenda.
- Inviting specialists or resource persons as required.
- Presiding over the meeting.
- Guiding the meeting as per the agenda.
- Ensuring all discussion items end with a positive decision.
- Reviewing and approving the meeting minutes.
- Assigning projects to members.

- Ensuring that the committee carries out its function.
- Ensuring all necessary meeting minutes, reports and forms are prepared and distributed as required.

A list of duties describing the chairperson's responsibilities and authority should be available to all members.

Fact sheet last revised: 2026-07-30

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