

## Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#161–7/25/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

### TOPIC: SAFETY – INCONSISTENT SAFETY COMMITTEES, CONTINUED

As indicated in the last topic, in some entities the failure of the Safety Committee to report information and recommendations to top management can be a fatal flaw. A second common problem deals with the make-up, or staffing, of the Committees.

Some entities stack their Committees with managers and upper level supervisors to the exclusion of rank and file workers. To managers this probably makes sense since they are responsible for providing and maintaining a safe workplace. A group of managers addressing safety issues create a management team that functions in an essentially management role. Unfortunately this is not the State's identified role of the Safety Committee. Its job is to communicate – to gather information from all levels of the organization and report with recommendations to upper management. To gather information from all levels, the Committee must have members from all levels.

It is acknowledged that some managers might be threatened by communication that occurs outside the chain of command. They see the potential for the Safety Committee becoming a tool for disgruntled employees, or for a release of information from their operations that they cannot control. The other side of the argument is that the Committee can become an outlet for employee frustrations over their manager's failure to address safety concerns. As long as the Safety Committee stays focused on safety issues – zealously avoiding blame or fault -- these should not become matters of concern.

The Safety Committee is a team of individuals that works together while spreading the work load to gather and communicate information on safety issues. It is not uncommon among our members for the Safety Committee to become dominated by a single person. Rather than being selected by the Committee that person is often the individual responsible for forming and maintaining the Committee. They might be the one that recruits the members, decides if and when the Committee will meet, and what the agenda will be. In essence, often without meaning to, they are managing or controlling the Committees activities and functions – it becomes a managed work unit. Another possibility is that the Committee becomes dominated by an individual who has a stronger personality, a safety background, or a personal agenda. This is why, to maintain energy, independence and credibility, it is essential that the formal positions in the Committee rotate on a regular or scheduled basis, and that responsibilities be identified and shared as a team.

Recognizing that work on the Committee falls outside its members' normal job duties, it is essential that the members have a tight structure and focus to minimize the disruption caused by participation. Additional focus should come from feedback and direction from the person with overall authority and responsibility – the person the Committee is reporting to – for the entity's safety programs. Ultimately it is that individual's needs and satisfaction that measures how well the Committee is functioning.

Next Topic: Safety – Inconsistent Safety Committees, Continued