

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – INCONSISTENT SAFETY COMMITTEES, CONTINUED

The Safety Committee exists, on an ongoing basis, to communicate safety issues and recommendations up, and in response, to take direction from the top – from the individual with overall responsibility and authority for maintaining the safety of the entity's work environment. When the Committee does not regularly meet, its effectiveness and value are marginalized. Unfortunately among our members there is an inconsistent commitment to Safety Committee meetings. Recognizing that Committee members have other pressing duties, it is not uncommon in some entities to see scheduled meetings canceled or postponed in response to conflicting schedules or time constraints. Similarly, for the same reasons, it is not uncommon to see an evolution to scheduling increasingly infrequent meetings.

It is recognized that some Safety Committees have operated in a vacuum. Their existence has become an end in and of itself; rather than being based on the value of the Committee's performance, its continued existence rests solely on a perceived requirement that the entity have one. In that situation, the committee members' accountability is to the Committee, not to management. The competing pressures on individual members are allowed to take on greater importance than the overall purpose of the Committee. Safety can become, once again, the issue that is addressed when everything else is done, or when it is convenient; participation on the Committee is one more extra job duty that no one has adequate time to perform.

The infrequency or irregularity of Safety Committee meetings might be an indication of a disconnect between the Safety Committee and the management that they are reporting to. If they are not receiving feedback and direction from upper management then it brings into question the value of the Committee's existence, and/or the quality of its performance. To be consistently effective, the Committee needs to be guided by the expectations of the individual that they are serving. It is the communicated needs of that individual that should define the adequacy of the Committee's efforts, and sets the standard for the frequency and regularity of Committee meetings. These decisions should not be left to the Committee's subjective judgment, or individual preferences.

In the worst case scenario, upper management's acceptance of infrequent or postponed Safety Committee meetings might be an indication of the value that it places on the Committee's performance. In turn, this again brings into issue the adequacy and quality of the Safety Committee's reports to upper management.

Next Topic: Safety – Inconsistent Safety Committees, Continued