

Safety committees



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In the past, we have written about the duties and responsibilities of the local safety committee. The *Handbook EL-809*, titled “Guidelines for Area/Local Joint Labor-Management Safety and Health Committees,” is issued under authority of Article 19 and is enforceable through the grievance procedure.

The introduction states:

...As an individual serving on the safety and health committee, you must have a personal commitment to make accident prevention a part of your daily work...If a workplace is safe, it is because somebody is working to make it safe. As a member of the safety and health committee, you are playing a major role in

making your workplace safe for all employees.

If you are on the committee, what are you working on?

What accident/injury are you investigating and what solutions are you developing to prevent a similar event? Many successful safety committees at the installation or district level are tackling the root cause of accidents/injuries and are making a difference.

Some committees are not as successful. What are they working on? Are we listening to statistics and nodding our heads in reaction to the number of accidents that we have suffered? Does the behavior of your local management team suggest that they are under pressure from above to reduce accidents, and the only way they know how to reduce the injuries is to pressure employees to be safe—and if an injury results, then to issue discipline? That is not the right way to address the needs of our safety world. Discipline is not the answer to improving a safety culture in any work environment.

The *Employee and Labor Relations Manual* contains a section dedicated to this principle at Section 821.3, Accident Analysis. It explains:

...Accident analysis is vital for identifying the hazardous conditions, contributing factors, and root causes of accidents...Installation heads/managers must use the results of accident analyses to address the causes of accidents, develop specific actions (countermeasures), and enter them into an accident reduction plan (ARP)...The ARP serves as management’s primary tool for reducing OSHA injury and illness (OSHA II) and motor vehicle accident (MVA) rates....

In the past, I have written about the need for objective investigation of the facts leading up to an accident/injury.

It is not the blame game that finds solutions to problems. Rather, it is an in-depth dive into the unbiased facts that will lead us to the truth. In my May 2013 column, I addressed accident investigation, drawing observations from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Its website includes the following history:

In 1974, Congress reestablished the NTSB as a completely separate entity, outside the Department of Transportation (DOT), reasoning that:

...No federal agency can properly perform such (investigatory) functions unless it is totally separate and independent from any other...agency of the United States.

Because the DOT has broad operational and regulatory responsibilities that affect the safety, adequacy and efficiency of the transportation system, and transportation accidents may suggest deficiencies in that system, the NTSB’s independence was deemed necessary for proper oversight. The NTSB, which has no authority to regulate, fund, or be directly involved in the operation of any mode of transportation, conducts investigations and makes recommendations from an objective viewpoint.

How does this relate to you on the committee? The *EL-809* contains a listing of the duties and responsibilities of the committee, including the following:

1. Create and maintain an interest in safety, health and ergonomics, and thereby help prevent accidents.
2. Monitor the progress of accident prevention and health activities and, when necessary, make recommendations for improvement to the installation head. Membership on a safety and health committee does not entitle the members to have access to individual employees’ medical records without the employee’s consent.
3. Determine program areas to receive increased emphasis and make recommendations.
4. Review safety and ergonomics training records to determine if all employees are receiving appropriate training.
5. Review PS Forms 1767, Report of Hazard, Unsafe Condition, or Practice, and responses or corrective action taken.
6. Review PS Forms 1769/301 and statistics from the National Accident Reporting System and the injury compensation program reporting system.

So, as I said earlier, dive into the facts. Review the 1767s and the 1769s. Your managers are required to provide these to you at the installation level, and you are tasked with reviewing them to get to the root cause, not to the easy-to-blame solution.

The purpose is to learn why accidents occur and to teach others what we have learned. Get involved if you aren’t already. Keep an eye on each other.