

Construction OS&H

Workers' perspectives

Organising for a Healthy and Safe Workplace Part 2



Reminder of the aims

1. Identify the main health and safety problems in our workplaces
2. Develop a Trade Union approach to occupational safety and health
3. Investigate hazards at work
4. Build workers' involvement, awareness, and support on occupational safety and health
5. Develop Trade Union organisation to ensure that employers eliminate or control risks
6. Develop confidence, knowledge and skills

Which will:

- Lead to practical action in the workplace
- Improve health and safety conditions for workers

OS&H Committees

A joint Union/management safety committee can be a good way of acting in partnership with the employer, and solving outstanding problems.

It is most important that health and safety activity is not just restricted to the health and safety committee.

Union representatives will need to decide whether they want a safety committee and how it should function, before any approach is made to the employer.

Composition of OS&H Committees

- Committees must be balanced
- There should never be less than two elected worker reps, and management reps must have authority to represent the company
- Chair should rotate
- Meet once a month and after incidents (‘accidents’)

Authority of OS&H Committees

- Executive decision-making and budget
- Advisory / can make recommendations, but no guarantee the company will comply
- Company should consider and give reasons if they do not accept proposals
- Procedure to resolve differences
- Collective bargaining demands

Functions

- Conduct regular inspections and surveys on safety and health
- Respond to workers concerns on OS&H
- Make reports and recommendations to improve compliance with law and standards
- Propose policies, work plans, projects and activities to reduce accidents and illness
- Propose and organise training programmes for the workforce
- Promote and support activities on OS&H
- Follow up progress of proposals
- Report on results achieved, point out obstacles and problems
- Investigate, record and report on all accidents, ill-health and near misses
- Propose regulations on health and safety
- Organise occupational health services

Union reps role

- Represent the interests and concerns of workers and promote the Union's policies
- Conduct inspections, interviews, surveys and meetings with workers, inform, communicate.
- Identify hazards, make proposals and negotiate improvements
- Push for high standards, ensure compliance with legal duties
- Make formal complaints
- Assist with representation and compensation

What makes a committee work?

- Have a plan and objectives and actively pursue them with the broadest support possible
- Communicate and educate to get that support
- Need facilities, time off, info and training
- Agendas in advance, proper minutes, decisions
- Prepare to negotiate. It's not a discussion it's a collective bargaining session between workers and management.
- Prepare the case, information, facts, support
- Anticipate management arguments
- List the arguments you will use and stick to the strong points
- Aim high and have your minimum demands

Checklist for OS&H Committees (1)

Level of management support

- Do they provide information promptly?
- Do they give facilities, time off for training?
- Are they responsive to worker proposals?

Responding to problems

- Do they prioritise?
- Do they really make improvements?
- Is the committee just a talking shop?

Worker confidence in the committee

- Do workers believe it's useful?
- Do workers see results?

Checklist for OS&H Committees (2)

Availability of records.

Is there transparency about decisions?

Limitations

- Low Union density, weak position of Unions
- Lack of recognition of TU from employer
- Informal sectors, sub-contracted labour and so called self-employed; hard to recruit and organise
- Non-compliance with law and hostility from employers
- Passivity and permissiveness from government authorities

Checklist for OS&H Committees

Possibilities

- Pick winners. Select workplaces where we have the best chance of organising
- Recruit workers into the Trade Union
- Be positive about the contribution that Trade Unions can make to the prevention of accidents and ill-health - solutions, training, etc
- Use the legal framework
- Use moral arguments
- Use argument of economic benefits