

Setting Up or Revamping a Safety Committee

Key Points

- Winter can be a good time for landscape companies to evaluate and update their safety programs. If your company doesn't have a formal, written program, see this [previous article](#) for guidance. Federal OSHA, insurance companies and industry organizations offer sample safety programs your firm can customize. NALP recently updated its [Safe Company Program Manual](#).
- An active safety committee comprised of both employees and managers is the backbone of an effective safety program and is vital to developing a strong, company-wide safety culture.
- Now could be a good time to start, restructure or make improvements to your safety committee. To function optimally, the safety committee should have rotating members representing every area of the company, and all employees should feel free to contribute ideas, concerns and suggestions.

Employers' and Supervisors' Checklist:

- ✓ Meet all regulations related to safety committees. Currently, there are no federal requirements for safety committees in private-sector workplaces, but many states require them. Some states also mandate safety committees for certain industries/sectors or businesses using specific work processes. Several states offer incentives such as reduced workers' compensation premiums or reduced violation penalties to companies with established safety committees. See "State Requirements" [here](#). To make sure your company is compliant with state requirements, contact your department of labor, local OSHA office, workers' compensation board or other applicable agency.
- ✓ Know the success of your company's safety committee depends first upon you. In a 2013 report published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine, researchers found committees that made meaningful impacts on workplace safety had clear and visible upper-management support.
- ✓ Provide authority, support and/or funding for the committee to quickly address safety hazards it identifies or implement new training it deems necessary. This is another key trait of effective committees, according to the American Journal of Industrial Medicine report.
- ✓ Let workers know that the reason for your safety committee and all your safety-related actions is to ensure they go home uninjured to their families every day.
- ✓ Understand the importance of including crew members on your company's safety committee. Frontline workers know how tasks are typically performed and can identify hazards others might overlook. A safety committee gives you the opportunity to tap into this

knowledge while encouraging people at all levels of your operation to feel responsible for safety.

- ✓ Try to make supervisors and managers a minority on your safety committee. A study published in the journal *New Solutions* in 2008 showed lower injury and illness rates for organizations with safety committees made up of more hourly workers than managers. Organizations with higher percentages of their workforce on safety committees had better rates as well.
- ✓ Create a committee that's the right size for your organization. While every employee level and every company sector – various types of crews, office, equipment yard, maintenance/repair shop, etc. – should be represented, there is no set rule about how many people are needed for a safety committee. If your company is small, a handful of people could suffice. If your company is large, you might want to set up multiple committees – representing each company sector – with a central committee to oversee them. This is a great way to involve more employees in your safety efforts; the central committee is crucial, however, in avoiding overlap and delegating tasks.
- ✓ Consider these formal positions for mid-sized or larger committees: chairperson (an identified “safety champion” who serves a two-year term); vice-chairperson (a safety champion in training to become the next chairperson); and secretary (responsible for preparing agendas, taking minutes and documenting all committee meetings).
- ✓ Choose appropriate safety-committee leaders. Effective leaders encourage participation by all members and are capable of facilitating meetings without dominating them or allowing others to do so.
- ✓ Clearly define the safety committee's duties. In most companies, the safety committee: identifies risks; investigates and/or reviews incidents/accidents/close calls and job-related injuries/illnesses and suggests actions to prevent recurrence; establishes annual goals for reducing hazards and injuries; monitors loss trends and insurance reports; conducts jobsite and facility safety inspections/audits; recommends changes to company safety policies; conducts safety orientation for new employees; reviews and acts on employees' safety suggestions; identifies needed safety training and implements training programs; posts all required OSHA reporting forms; and prepares an annual safety improvement plan.
- ✓ Hold safety committee meetings at least monthly.
- ✓ Rotate committee members on a predetermined schedule, with some rotation occurring at least once a year. This will bring fresh ideas to the committee and provide extra safety education/awareness to more employees.
- ✓ Invite non-committee, frontline workers to participate in meetings and discuss day-to-day hazards they encounter. Do this periodically and make sure all employees know they are welcome to address the committee at any meeting.
- ✓ Establish measurable goals, a written agenda, a format (members take turns talking with no interruptions, the person reporting on a specific topic speaks first for three to five minutes, etc.), and a starting and ending time for each regular meeting.
- ✓ Specify a format for the committee secretary to use when taking and distributing minutes.
- ✓ Ensure copies of meeting minutes are distributed to all company employees.
- ✓ Train designated committee members in filling out and posting required OSHA forms.
- ✓ Give committee members specified timelines for completing “assignments.”

- ✓ Have key managers meet with the safety committee to review incident records, identify trends and establish goals for the next year.
- ✓ Know not all safety-related goals have to be tied to injury reduction. For example, goals could include increasing safety-tailgate-training participation by 10 percent or reducing the number of times crew members violate PPE rules.
- ✓ Make goals measurable and document in writing whether they were met. Invite employees to meetings to gather ideas for achieving goals.

Employee dos and don'ts

Do:

- Understand that if your company has a safety committee, it was established with the goal of ensuring you go home safely each day.
- Know that the safety committee needs your input and involvement. Because you are on the frontline, you know how certain tasks are completed day-to-day and could be aware of hazards others aren't.
- Immediately report safety concerns to your supervisor; then ask to address the safety committee about problems that are systemic or can't be quickly and easily solved.
- Volunteer to serve on your company's safety committee. People from all levels and sectors of the company are needed, and members rotate often. Companies whose safety committees contain more hourly workers than managers have lower injury and illness rates.

Don't

- Turn down opportunities to attend or speak at safety committee meetings. The committee values your opinions, and if you have been invited, committee members might need you to share important information.
- Be afraid to attend a safety committee meeting or ask questions or offer suggestions at meetings. Sharing your experiences and thoughts could prevent serious accidents.

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