

## Supervisor Safety Meetings

**The supervisor is the person in any program who creates and maintains interest in safety. Whatever the title assigned to this key person, he or she is responsible for translating management's policies into action and for promoting safety activities directly among employees. How well this is carried out will help determine how favorably employees react to safety activities.**

Setting a good example, such as wearing safety glasses and other personal protective equipment whenever required, is one of the most effective ways in which the supervisor can promote safety. This is part of becoming a respected leader. Another important activity is holding effective safety meetings.

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### WHY ARE SAFETY MEETINGS IMPORTANT?

The open, informal atmosphere of a small group meeting encourages the kind of questions and discussion that personalize the issue of safety by focusing on its day-to-day applications. It is important for supervisors to meet regularly with small groups of employees to discuss the various aspects of job safety and health. Face-to-face contact is the most effective communication mode.

### WHAT DO REGULAR SAFETY MEETINGS DO?

They encourage safety awareness. Other means of getting the safety message across are sometimes ignored. It increases everyone's safety consciousness when a group of workers get together to discuss the hazards they encounter in their daily operations and steps they can take to eliminate them. When they personally participate in meetings, they will remember more information and retain it for a longer period of time.

Safety meetings get employees actively involved. In a sense, safety meetings put employees "on the spot", that is, they demand feedback. They get employees thinking about safety and encourage them to come up with new ideas and suggestions for preventing incidents and minimizing the hazards with which they are most familiar. They motivate employees to follow proper safety procedures. A small group meeting is the best place to demonstrate the use of personal protective equipment, proper lifting techniques and other specific safety procedures. You can create a shared vision and a sense of watching out for each other's safety as a daily habit.

A department safety meeting is the time to pinpoint minor hazards before they result in real problems. It also presents a good opportunity to discuss hazards that are inherent in the work environment and that experienced employees may take for granted.

They introduce workers to new safety rules, equipment and preventative practices. In addition to introducing new ways of looking at things, a safety meeting is a good time to reinforce the importance of long-standing safety procedures and to remind employees of the reasons behind them.

### TYPES OF SAFETY MEETINGS

Your company's safety meetings can take a number of different forms. One example is the tailgate or toolbox meeting held before a crew begins a job. The crew gathers around to discuss the work. They begin laying out the tools, safety equipment and materials they will need, and decide who will handle each task.

Another type is a department-wide meeting held shortly after an incident has occurred. Its purpose is to make other employees aware of the hazard, to discuss why the incident happened, and to head off similar incidents in the future. Some companies use small group meetings to supplement safety campaigns or to reinforce company policies. Such meetings usually focus on a specific safety program element, such as fire prevention or fall protection.

While safety meetings obviously require some planning and forethought, there is danger in adhering to a set formula. Employees have little enthusiasm for attending meetings that are carbon copies of each other. This is why supervisors must go a step further to be sure:

1. Interest is aroused and held.
2. Meetings are not overloaded with information and ideas.
3. The atmosphere is comfortable enough both physically and emotionally to prevent restlessness and encourage participation.
4. Attendees leave with an improved attitude and more useful information than when the meeting started.

Perhaps the most successful type of safety meeting, and one that lends itself to a small group format, is the weekly instructional meeting designed to provide employees with the pertinent facts about a specific hazard or safety procedure. Such meetings typically last only 5 to 10 minutes -long enough to get the information across, but short enough to avoid boredom and restlessness.

4. Set a time limit. Decide on a realistic timetable and stick to it. Employees are more apt to pay attention when they know the meeting is not going to drag on for hours. Meetings should normally be short and to the point.
5. Practice your delivery. You do not necessarily have to stand in front of a mirror and rehearse, but at least give some thought to how your employees will interpret your manner of presentation. Try to convey your sincerity and interest through your stance, gestures and tone of voice.
6. Devise strategies to get employees involved. Think of some up open questions requiring more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Set aside some time at the end for discussion and prepare some thought-provoking comments that will keep the discussion going.

3. Demonstrate. Acting out or role-playing a safety procedure is one way of making sure your message has been received. Using visual aids is another. Anything you can do to demonstrate your point and get employees involved in the demonstration will give your meeting added impact.
4. Open the meeting up for discussion. Use the discussion period to answer questions, clarify misunderstandings, and obtain feedback from employees. An active discussion is usually a good indication that your meeting has been successful.
5. Summarize the major points. When your time has run out, it is a good idea to recap what has been discussed and decided. If the group has agreed on steps to correct a hazard, or to address an unsafe condition or actions, this is the time to remind employees what they have agreed to do.

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## PREPARATION AND PLANNING

No matter what topic you choose, we suggest you follow a few guidelines in preparing for your meeting:

1. Choose your topic carefully. A subject related to a recent incident or to the purchase of new machinery will make a greater impression on employees than a less timely topic. Try to connect the discussion to current working conditions as much as possible.
2. Gather your figures. Be sure they are complete and accurate. Consider whether they might have more impact in the form of a chart or another visual aid. Retention increases greatly when your audience can see as well as hear your message.
3. Map out your presentation. Decide ahead of time on the best way to present the subject of the meeting. Try to anticipate employees' questions and reactions in advance. Highlight what you hope to accomplish in terms of changed attitudes and behaviors.

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## HOW TO CONDUCT A MEETING

If you have been thorough in your preparation and planning, the meeting will practically run itself. While supervisors who are not in the habit of conducting weekly safety sessions may approach the task with some nervousness, experience usually lays these fears to rest. Hold the meeting when workers are fresh (the start of shift or right after a break). Find a restful location where workers can relax, sit and concentrate on the meeting. Keep it brief and encourage lots of participation. Here are some basic steps for conducting a meeting on almost any safety topic.

1. Introduce the topic. Tell the group in straightforward terms the topic for the meeting. If you have a punch line or some other good lead-in use it, otherwise keep it simple. Do not go overboard trying to be clever, and do not be offensive.
2. Present the facts. Be as concise as possible in providing employees with any necessary background on the subject. Then present your facts in as interesting a manner as possible.

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## CONCLUSIONS

Safety meetings play an important role in your safety program. To succeed supervisors need to:

- understand the reasons for meetings to be held;
- choose a meeting format and prepare a topic that employees will relate to; and
- run the meeting with an eye towards worker participation.

There is one final and very important note. You must follow up by enforcing the safe work practices discussed. Your crew will waste most of the value of the safety meeting if you talk safety, but then observe and ignore unsafe actions. It is not enough just to discuss safety. Each supervisor must also lead by example. Attached is a sample safety meeting agenda that can be used to document meetings.

## **SAFETY MEETING AGENDA**

Department / Job site \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting date \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Open Meeting & Present safety topic:**

2. Read minutes from previous meeting.

**3. Persons present:**

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

**4. Old Business** – Status of previous recommendations. Discuss pending old business if any.

**5. Incidents** – Discuss injury incidents and near misses that have occurred since the last meeting. Brief summary of incidents to date by number and type. Note any trends. Discuss corrective action taken or needed. Concentrate on causes to make everyone more aware.

**6. Inspection Reports** – Report on findings and recommendations of any inspection reports made since last meeting.

**7. New Business** – Solicit employee suggestions. Discuss new procedures, changes to company safety policy, etc.

Time meeting started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting chaired by: \_\_\_\_\_