

Union Participation in an SMS

An effective safety management system (SMS) establishes a partnership between management and labor. If your organization has civilian employees represented by one or more bargaining units (i.e., unions), then bargaining units officials (known as employee representatives) should support and be actively involved in the SMS. This one pager provides some suggestions on engaging your employee representatives.



Image retrieved from Bing Images (Creative Commons)

CULTIVATE UNION SUPPORT

Leadership alone cannot improve an organization's safety and health (S&H) program or safety culture. Inviting employee representatives to participate in the SMS, such as being a member of the safety committee, offers them a stake in developing, implementing, and sustaining S&H programs and policies. Regularly communicate and provide meeting minutes for employee representatives unable to attend committee meetings. Ask employee representatives to attend safety-related functions and meetings and voice their opinions and concerns. Request their advice and support for S&H decisions affecting the organization. Encourage employee representatives' participation during employee awards and recognition ceremonies. These roles and active involvement showcase the benefits of the SMS, motivates employee representatives to garner bargaining unit support, and helps the organization effectively implement S&H actions.



Image retrieved from Bing Images (Creative Commons)

If your organization is pursuing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) Star approval, bargaining unit support in writing is required. Each collective bargaining unit must provide a statement of support for the SMS or sign the organization's application for Star approval. See the SMCX One Pager, "*Developing an OSHA VPP Union Commitment Letter*", for guidance on statements of support, available on the Links and Resources page of the SMCX website (<https://www.smcx.org/Links>).

If pursuing an SMS other than OSHA VPP, your organization should consider utilizing a signed statement of support from local bargaining units as a best practice to demonstrate the bargaining unit leadership's commitment towards bettering workplace S&H.

DEVELOP WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Creating and maintaining strong working relationships takes sincere commitment by leadership, management, and employee representatives. This group's focus is making the workplace safer. It is up to leadership and the employee representatives to work together and address any employee S&H problems or concerns and seek agreeable resolutions. This tables summarizes how working relationships contribute to SMS success.

LEADERSHIP	MANAGEMENT	EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES
Empower and motivate the team	Actively participate in S&H programs (e.g., workplace inspections, training)	Show support for the SMS
Respect individual opinions and recognize good S&H behaviors	Empower employees to report and fix S&H hazards	Actively participate on safety committees or working groups
Provide S&H resources for the team (e.g., budget, personnel, training)	Communicate S&H program information (e.g., goals, policies, and inspection results)	Serve as a conduit for communicating SMS information to bargaining unit members
Establish and track specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound goals	Encourage employees to participate in meaningful S&H activities (e.g., conducting hazard analyses, performing self- inspections)	
Communicate goals and progress across the organization	Recognize employees for S&H successes	Serve as an SMS advocate during mentor or assessment team visits
Trust the process!		

UNION WITHDRAWAL OF SMS SUPPORT

The collective bargaining unit has the right to withdraw its support for the SMS at any time. This withdrawal might occur if the unit perceives lack of management support or commitment toward S&H at an organization. Bargaining units should only consider withdrawing support from an SMS when employee S&H is involved, not as a bargaining chip for other union initiatives. Without full bargaining unit support, an organization seeking OSHA VPP Star approval or re-approval would no longer qualify and would need to withdraw from the program. This withdrawal does not exempt bargaining unit employees from complying with the requirements of the organization's S&H program.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.