

Utilizing Employee-Led SMS Teams

Along with management commitment, employee participation is a cornerstone of any successful safety management system (SMS). A great way to support employee participation in your SMS is to develop employee-led teams. Employees provide a different perspective and have the “on the ground” knowledge needed to ensure continual process improvement. Additionally, these teams can serve as a tool for leadership to help ensure SMS implementation is successful.



Image shows an employee team working on a project
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BENEFITS

Employee-led teams are a great way to increase employee involvement and ownership in the SMS. You empower employees to be more involved with the SMS when they take the lead on teams. Your employees become more aware of the SMS, its benefits, and their roles and responsibilities to help your organization achieve its safety and health (S&H) goals and objectives. Additionally, when management encourages employees to lead teams, it shows trust in their employees, helps build a better labor-management relationship, and improves morale.

CHALLENGES

Employees leading teams can create some challenges. Employees are a very important part of day-to-day operations and their absence has the potential to impact these operations. The more time an employee spends leading a team, the less time they have to perform their day-to-day job.

You must use resources such as time and money to train your employees to have specific skills, including leadership skills, which enables them to successfully lead a team. Time management, task setting, and conflict resolution, along with topics like accident investigation, hazard inspections, and job hazard/safety analysis (JHA/JSA) writing, are just a few of the training topics you should consider to ensure employees are setup for success.

EXAMPLES OF EMPLOYEE-LED TEAMS

INSPECTION TEAMS

Employees are the front line for all operations; therefore, having an employee-led team conduct regular work area safety inspections is a valuable tool in hazard prevention and control. Employees may have more knowledge or look at the work area differently than S&H professionals, and with the proper training, can identify other hazards.

HAZARD AWARENESS TEAMS

With the proper training, employees can lead and develop hazard analysis, such as JHA or JSA, for their local work area. After all, no one knows their work environment and the hazards and risks related to the specific job task better than the employees. Plus, if the employees are the ones creating the hazard analysis, they are more likely to follow them.

COMMUNICATION TEAMS

An employee-led communication team is an ideal method to get SMS information to the workforce. Sometimes, the message is better received if it comes from a peer, rather than management. This team can also gather information from the workforce on the positive aspects and challenges of SMS implementation and continuous improvement.

S&H COMMITTEES

While having employees chair the S&H committee may be a challenge, having them co-chair is an ideal method of increasing employee participation and buy-in to SMS implementation and improvement. Often, S&H committees have sub-committees or working groups to assist the committee with a particular task or problem. These sub-committees are another great approach to have employees take charge of S&H.

ANNUAL SELF-EVALUATION

Throughout the year, employee-led teams help complete tasks and collect data on those tasks.

Be sure to include this information in your annual self-evaluation. Employees should not be in charge of the annual self-evaluation; rather, be sure to include members from the employee-led teams in the annual self-evaluation team and actively engage them in the process. Additionally, the team results and future planning should be a central part of your annual self-evaluation report.

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



Image shows an employee team preparing for an activity
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