

Utilizing Employee-Led SOHMS Teams

Along with management commitment, employee participation is a cornerstone of any successful safety and occupational health management system (SOHMS). A great way to support employee participation in your SOHMS 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 SOHMS implementation is successful.

BENEFITS

Employee-led teams are a great way to increase employee involvement and ownership in the SOHMS. You empower employees to be more involved with the SOHMS when they take the lead on teams. Your employees become more aware of the SOHMS, 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 relationships, and improves morale.



Image shows an employee team working on a project
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CHALLENGES

Employees leading teams can create some challenges. Employees are a vital 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, and enable them to successfully lead a team. To ensure you are positioning your employees for success, consider training in such areas as time management, task setting, and conflict resolution, along with S&H topics like accident investigation, hazard inspections, and job hazard/safety analysis (JHA/JSA) writing.

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. Teams also provide employees the opportunity to inspect other work areas outside of their own. Having an “outside set of eyes” on other work areas or operations can result in better overall inspections.

HAZARD AWARENESS TEAMS

With proper training, employees can lead and develop hazard analyses, such as JHAs or JSAs, for their local work area. After all, no one knows the work environment, hazards, and risks related to specific operations 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 disseminate SOHMS 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 SOHMS implementation and continuous improvement.



Image shows an employee team preparing for an activity
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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 SOHMS implementation and improvement. Often, S&H committees have sub-committees or working groups to assist the S&H 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 TEAMS

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 placed in charge of the annual self-evaluation; rather, 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.

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