Orientation Guide for Occupational Health & Safety Committees

This guide outlines the legislated requirements around Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) committees. It provides important information on how OH&S committees function effectively in the workplace and is recommended to be reviewed by all OH&S Committee members.

What is an Occupational Health & Safety Program?

To create a safety culture, you need a plan. An OH&S program is an organized, written action plan to identify and control hazards, define safety responsibilities, and respond to emergencies. The objective of a program is to integrate safety and health into all work practices and conditions. An OH&S program is legally required under the PEI OH&S Act for provincially regulated employers with 20 or more employees.

The **Health PEI OH&S Program** is available on the Health PEI Staff Resource Centre at:
https://src.healthpei.ca/occupational-health-and-safety

OH&S Committees

OH&S committees are groups of worker and employer representatives working together to identify and solve health and safety problems at the work site. The primary purpose of the committee is to facilitate communication on health and safety issues. An effective committee will help reduce losses associated with accidents and occupational illness.

Under Section 25 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, OH&S Committees are mandatory in all workplaces with over 20 employees. Committees are required to meet monthly.

Education sessions on how to get a safety committee active or more involved are available from the Workers Compensation Board by calling, toll free at 1-800- 237-5049. To register for education sessions, email ohs@wcb.pe.ca, or call 902 368 5697.

Benefits of an Occupational Health & Safety Committee

Communication is the key to an effective health and safety system. The committee provides a link between the people doing the work and the people directing it. This brings a broad range of expertise and experience to assist with identifying hazards and finding solutions. Committees bring health and safety issues out into the open to have them resolved. The improved communication reduces accidents, benefits production and contributes to the sense of teamwork in the workplace.

With an effective health and safety committee:

1. Accidents are reduced.
2. Awareness of health and safety is improved.
3. A broad base of expertise and experience is available for solving problems.
4. Co-operation is encouraged through better communication.
5. All workers have a way to express concerns and have them addressed.



Roles (Section 25 of the Act)

Committee

- Involve all persons in the workplace in health and safety concerns by responding to and discussing concerns brought up by co-workers.
- Hold monthly meetings and encourage each member to contribute their own expertise.
- Perform tasks outside the committee meetings, as assigned. This could include incident follow up, workplace inspections, participation in committee initiatives, etc.
- Identify health and safety hazards in the workplace and make recommendations to correct them.
- Receive and investigate complaints about safety. Ensure these are referred to supervisors, reported to the committee and followed up.
- Educate fellow workers about risks and safe work procedures.
- Orient new workers to health and safety risks and procedures.
- Participate in accident investigations and regularly scheduled workplace inspections.
- Advise management on corrections for safety problems and monitor effectiveness.
- Obtain information when necessary and advise on appropriate protective devices, equipment and clothing.
- Advise on the establishment of appropriate health and safety programs, education and training.
- Maintain records of meetings and activities.
- Attend right to refuse situations.
- Have a member accompany the WCB Occupational Health and Safety officer on inspection.

Chair or co-chairs

It is recommended committees have co–chairs, one from management and one from worker representatives who alternate chairing duties. The duties include:

- Schedule meetings, arrange time, dates, and place.
- Run the meetings. This means starting and stopping on time, keeping discussion on track, and sticking to the agenda.
- Request Employee Event reports from the Wellness & Safety Team to review with the committee.
- Help members agree on the problem and arrive at a consensus on the solution. A consensus is more effective than a majority rules system.
- When necessary, ensure recommendations are presented to the employer in writing, with a request for a written response, and the committee is informed of the employer's response.
- Ensure everyone has an opportunity to share facts and ideas.
- Assign tasks to committee members.

Role of the Secretary

The secretary can be a committee member or someone brought in to do minutes. Secretaries can play an important role in clarifying decisions for the minutes. The secretary will:

- Compile the agenda and notify members of meeting times and location.
- Prepare minutes, ensure they are agreed to, circulate reports and ensure minutes are posted.
- Point out those items recorded in past minutes that require discussion or follow up by the committee.
- Where necessary clarify what decisions have been made.

Points to Remember

- The committee's main function is to help improve health and safety. It is essential that worker / management issues are kept separate.
- The committee is an advisory body. It does not have the authority to dictate changes. Its role is to recommend. This means that the committee cannot be held responsible for violations of the OH&S Act. The committee may write letters to managers or senior leadership to express site concerns and recommendations.
- Training is recommended for safety committee members. The most common topics are OH&S legislation, workplace inspection, accident investigation and injury prevention.
- Safety committees are most effective if they are clear about their role. It helps to meet regularly and carry out the basic functions of workplace inspection and accident investigation.
- The committee is not responsible for discipline regarding health and safety. Its role is to be the eyes and ears of safety concerns. Problems around compliance with health and safety procedures or personal protective equipment are the responsibility of supervisors. The committee's role here could be to look at why.

Terms of Reference

Each OH&S Committee must establish its own terms of reference. They must fall within the guidelines of the OH&S Act. It is recommended that you familiarize yourself with your committee's terms of reference.

A sample terms of reference template is available on the Staff Resource Centre at: https://src.healthpei.ca/occupational-health-and-safety under "Committee Resources."

Terms of reference should answer the following questions:

1. How often will the committee meet and for how long? The Act specifies monthly meetings unless there are reasons to change this approve by Provincial OH&S. Meetings should **only** be cancelled in emergency circumstances.
2. Will there be one chair or co–chairs? How long will the term be?
3. How many members will you have? This will depend on the size of the workplace and the hazards found there. It is a good idea to have representation from a variety of departments.
4. How long will members serve? A minimum of one year is suggested.
5. Will you require a quorum? What will the ratio be? Quorum will be defined in your committee's terms of reference. As per OH&S legislation, a quorum must have more worker representatives than management representatives. Legislation does not specify that all unions must be present.

6. How will the secretary be selected and how long will the term be?
7. How and where will records be kept? They should be kept for at least 5 years.
8. Will you name alternates for committee members? If you do, what training will they receive?
9. Will you operate by consensus? How will decisions be made?
10. If your members do shift work, how will they be compensated?
11. How much and what type of training will members be given?
12. How will you receive complaints or concerns? In most workplaces, a verbal complaint or concern reported to a member is sufficient. In some cases, written complaints may be necessary. Refer to Appendix A for the process for submitting an OH&S Concern.

Reviewing Employee Events during Meetings

Employee Events are to be reviewed and discussed at OH&S committee meetings to ensure appropriate follow-up is completed and to prevent the recurrence of incidents.

1. The committee chair requests the **monthly Employee Event** Report by completing the PSMS "Scope/Report Change Request Form for Supervisors, Managers & Directors", selecting "Add" beside "monthly Report," having it signed by approver/manager, and sent to the Service Centre.

2. The Chair summarizes each Employee Event to the committee in enough detail to understand what happened and why it happened.

3. For each Employee Event, the committee discusses recommendations and what can be learned from the event. The committee assigns a committee member to follow up on the incident by a specified deadline.

4. The meeting minutes must capture the review of Employee Events and the action items discussed by the committee. The following is a helpful format to record the incidents in the meeting minutes:

Incident #	Date	Concern	Action	Responsibility	Deadline
12345	Sept. 1, 2020	Employee fell in parking lot, tripped in hole on broken pavement. Cut knee.	Follow up with maintenance to see if hole in parking lot addressed	Committee member John Doe	Sept. 2, 2020

Please see the "Employee Event Incident Review Guide" on the Staff Resource Centre under "Committee Resources" at: https://src.healthpei.ca/occupational-health-and-safety for further information on reviewing Employee Events.

Workplace Inspections



The purpose of workplace inspections is to identify hazards and recommend corrective actions before an accident occurs. A checklist and discussion with workers in the area being inspected will ensure you are seeing everything. Inspections are required in the section of the legislation requiring health and safety programs.

Considerations for Workplace Inspections:

1. How often will the inspections be performed? Will they be announced or random? It is helpful to set up a schedule for the year to ensure all areas are inspected. All areas need to be inspected annually.
2. Who on the committee will do them and how will they be organized? Assigning areas to be inspected by teams of 2 committee members in a workplace inspection schedule is helpful.
3. Will you do the entire workplace at one time or divide it? Selecting an area(s) each month can help ensure the entire workplace is inspected over the year.
4. Will committee members be trained on workplace inspections?
5. What forms will you use? How will you report results? Will you use a checklist?
6. How will you follow up?

Workplace Inspection Forms

Forms are available in the Health PEI OH&S Program document or under “Committee Resources” on the Staff Resource Centre at: https://src.healthpei.ca/occupational-health-and-safety

Hosting an Effective Meeting

- Have an agenda for the meeting and provide the committee members in advance.
- Agenda items could include:
    - Review/additions to the agenda
    - Review and approval of the previous meeting minutes
    - Review of the previous meeting’s action items and update on their status
        - Education (i.e. “Safety Talk” topic). Resources are available at:
            - Health PEI Staff Resource Centre - https://src.healthpei.ca/
            - WCB PEI website - http://www.wcb.pe.ca/
            - Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety (CCOSH) - https://www.ccohs.ca/
            - WorkSafe BC - https://www.worksafebc.com/en
    - Review of recent workplace inspections
    - Review of Employee Events
    - Musculo-skeletal injury prevention (MSIP)
    - Any upcoming safety related training
    - New business items
- Start and end on time. Members will lose interest if the time requirement is too great. Discuss ongoing concerns and progress made.
- Review any concerns and assign a committee member to follow up by a specified deadline.
- Ensure recommendations are practical, measurable, and doable.

Occupational Health and Safety Act – Rights & Responsibilities

Worker Responsibilities

- Report all unsafe conditions and hazards.
- Follow safe work procedures.
- Use personal protective equipment when necessary.
- Co-operate with the Health and Safety committee or representative.

Worker Rights

- The right to know about potential hazards.
- The right to participate in making the workplace safe and healthy. This participation can be in the form of being a safety representative or in consultation with the employer, supervisor or representative.
- The right to refuse unsafe work. There is a protocol to follow in refusing unsafe work:

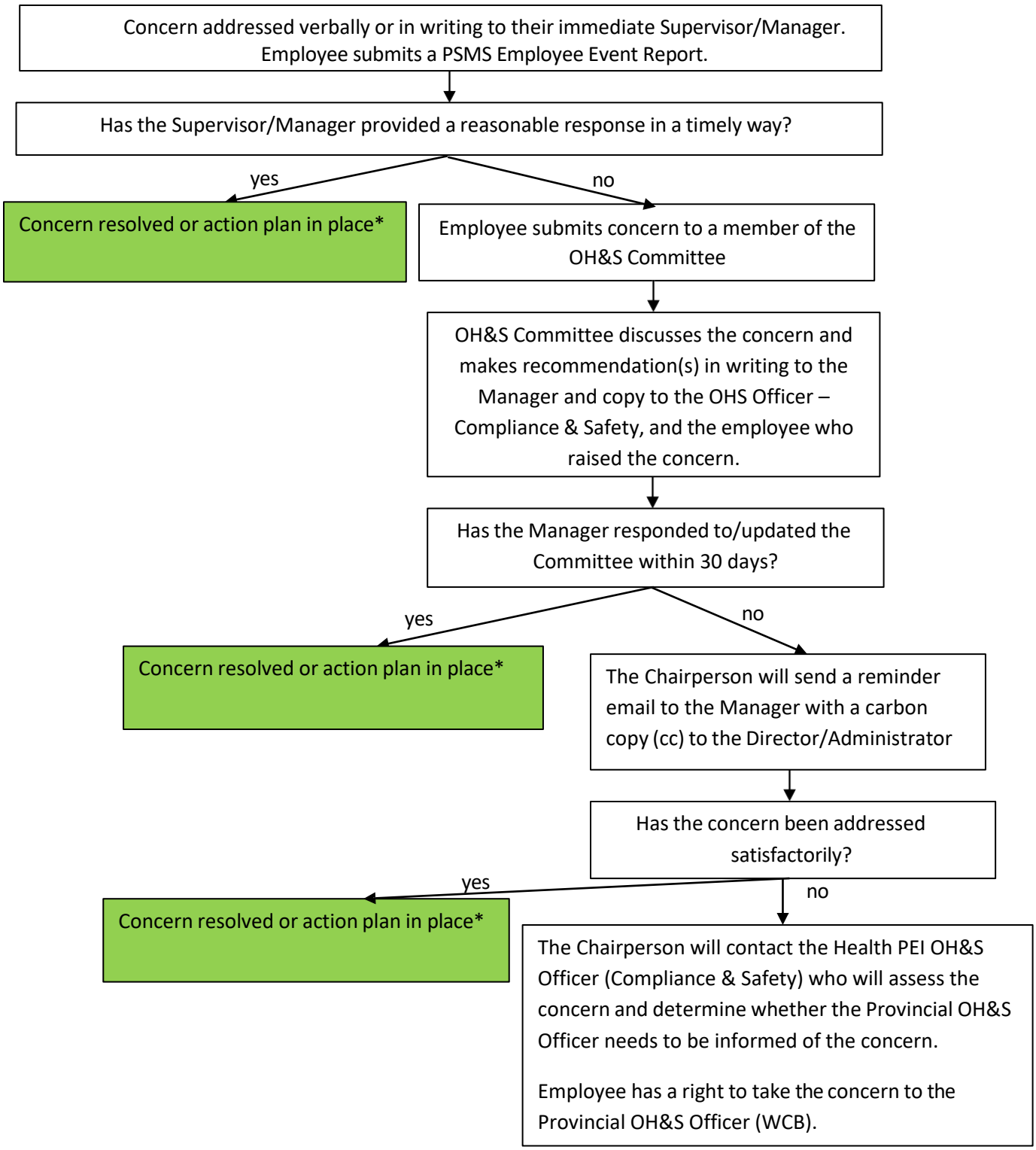
    1. Inform the supervisor.
    2. If he/she is unable to resolve the problem, call in the safety committee for an opinion.
    3. If the issue is still unresolved, the worker or the health and safety committee may call in the WCB OH&S officer. The worker concerned must stay in the workplace while the officer is called in to make a determination. The employer has the right to assign the worker to alternate work. Another worker can be asked to do the work that was refused, provided that he/she is informed of the safety concerns and refusal.

Employer Responsibilities

The Act requires employers to ensure the health and safety of persons at the workplace. They are required to:

- Provide and maintain equipment, machines, and materials in a safe manner.
- Provide training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of workers.
- Ensure that workers, particularly supervisors, are familiar with workplace hazards and the procedures to minimize risks.
- Operate the business so workers are not exposed to health or safety hazards.
- For details on responsibilities, consult the Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations.

Appendix A: Submitting an Occupational Health and Safety Concern



** Please note that the resolution must address the safety hazard and may not be the recommendation given by the employee or committee.*