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National Education Association (NEA)
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New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC)

PEOSH
New Jersey Dept. of Health and Senior Services
(Health hazards complaints)
PO Box 360
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This fact sheet was prepared by the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC). Based in Trenton, WEC provides NJEA and other organizations with technical assistance and training about workplace and environmental hazards.

Health and Safety Committees

HEALTH AND SAFETY

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

HEALTH & SAFETY FACTS 

Health and Safety Committees

Any effective effort to make our schools safer and healthier needs to involve NJEA members. Perhaps the best vehicle for member involvement is the health and safety committee which keeps a day-to-day watch over school conditions, identifying and resolving problems before they become serious or result in injuries or illnesses. Committees also provide valuable assistance to association members and school districts.

Experience has shown that it is best for locals to form their own association committee as well as participate in joint labor-management committees at the school and/or district levels. A joint health and safety committee is not a replacement for an association committee, but a complement to it. Indeed, it is only with an association committee that locals can successfully act as watchdogs over the effectiveness of corrective measures taken by district management.

The local association health and safety committee should be a standing committee working closely with local leaders and UniServ representatives. The health and safety committee is the association structure for identifying health and safety issues and facilitating problem solving. Communication with fellow members and with district administration is key to the success of any health and safety committee.

Interested members are crucial to successful committees. Committee members need not be experts in health and safety; interest and concern about the issues are far more important. An understanding of technical and scientific information can be acquired in the course of the committee work. A committee should have about 10 members representing as many job titles and locations as possible, including teachers, special education teachers, paraeducators, custodial/maintenance workers, security staff, secretaries, food service, and bus

drivers. School nurses are especially important to recruit both because of their specialized education and awareness of health issues among students and staff.

There are many activities association committees can undertake to identify and prevent hazardous exposures to school personnel. The list below is not exhaustive, but provides a good indication of what the work of the committee can look like.

Association Committee Activities

- Inform members about the committee. Post minutes of meetings. Post names and phone numbers of contact people. Report on successes in NJEA newsletters.
- Educate committee members and other members. Distribute NJEA Health and Safety Facts. Discuss with your UniServ representative presenting a health and safety training.
- Develop a hazard reporting form and procedures for members.
- Conduct a survey for documenting work-related health problems of members.
- Set priorities and develop strategy.
- Pick a small “winnable” topic. Start with an issue that is relatively easy to resolve and affects many members. Improving housekeeping often meets this objective.
- Develop contract language for a health and safety committee, including “release time” (paid leave) for committee work.
- Ensure the school district is complying with PEOSHA health and safety regulations. Learn how to effectively use PEOSHA by contacting your UniServ representative.
- Resolve health and safety grievances; develop expedited health and safety grievance procedure.
- Recommend improvements to the district.
- Follow up on the district’s actions.
- Develop a health and safety library, and files on common hazards and controls.

Joint Labor-Management Committees

After an association committee is well established, it is recommended that the local propose a joint labor-management health and safety committee to district management. Such committees can function either at the school or district level or both. Ideal conditions for labor-management committees include the following points; eventually these should be negotiated into the local contract.

Mission and Powers

- The committee should not be merely advisory but should have decision-making power and report to someone who implements its decisions.
- The committee should have access to the entire school for inspections and investigations of accidents, near misses, and complaints.

Committee Make-Up

- The association and management should be equally represented.
- The local should choose association members.
- The chair should rotate between the association and management.

Committee Meetings

- The committee should meet regularly (at least once per month). Either party should be able to call an emergency meeting.
- Labor and management should make up the agenda together. The minutes should be approved by both parties and distributed to both management and membership, and include action items and deadlines.
- There should be a neutral procedure for breaking tie votes.

Pay for Lost Time

- As much as possible, all regular committee meetings and walk-around inspections should be conducted during working hours. Safety and health committee members should receive their regular pay for all time spent on committee functions; including regular inspections and meetings, accident and complaint investigations, accompanying PEOSHA inspectors during their inspections, and other health and safety activities.

Training

- The contract should provide that each association representative to the joint health and safety committee receive a certain amount of training in occupational health and safety within a prescribed time period. The contract should specify how the training will be selected; by the association with the approval of management, or by joint agreement. It should also spell out how this training will be financed. Management should receive the same training as association representatives.

PEOSH Compliance Review

Activities for Both Types of Committees

Health and Safety Program Review

- Review, revise and strengthen district health and safety programs covering indoor air quality; mold prevention and remediation; violence prevention; parking lot safety; ergonomics; safe lifting; preventing slips and falls; minimizing the purchase of chemically-formulated products; purchasing least toxic chemically-formulated products; asbestos, lead, and radon management; bloodborne pathogens; pest control and pesticides use, etc.
- Review compliance with PEOSHA standards; including sanitation, record keeping, emergency response and fire prevention, exits, indoor air quality, and bloodborne pathogens.

Inspections

- The committee should conduct regular walk-around inspections to detect, evaluate and recommend actions to prevent potential health and safety hazards.
- Follow-up inspections should be conducted to guarantee that management has promptly and adequately carried out the committee's recommendations.

Renovations/New Construction

- The committee should assess potential hazards from proposed school renovations and new construction and recommend corrective measures.

Access to Information

- The committee should have access to all injury and illness records maintained by the employer for PEOSHA or workers' compensation purposes. The committee should also have access to:
 - Records of any workplace surveys for safety or health hazards.
 - Records of environmental monitoring by PEOSH or consultants.
 - Lists of all chemicals used or present in the workplace.
 - Past PEOSHA and fire department inspection reports and citations.
 - Material Safety Data Sheets on chemically formulated products.
 - Violence and vandalism reports.
 - Costs of different materials and actions under consideration to abate hazards.

Investigations

- Committee members should investigate any employee complaint of health and safety problems, accidents, or near misses and recommend solutions. The committee should be able to take samples with industrial monitoring equipment and to call in mutually acceptable outside experts to do any additional testing. Members should also participate in any PEOSHA or fire department inspections or consultations.

HEALTH & SAFETY FACTS

Health and Safety Committees

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION, SOLUTIONS, RESOURCES

How to Make Your Job

Healthier (June 2002 edition) 45 pages. Prepared by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Occupational Health Service. The booklet covers identification of occupational health hazards and action steps for improving conditions, including education, enforcement, and compensation. Also covers protection from discrimination for health and safety activity. Includes a valuable chart of hazards with applicable OSHA regulations and a survey of work-related health problems. Request this free publication by calling 609-984-1863. Also available online at www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/survweb/howto.pdf

Educational Materials on Health and Safety Committees

These publications are available on the NJEA website: members only section; under health and safety, general resources, health and safety committees.

Joint Committees

– Joint Labor-Management Health and Safety Committees

8 pages. Prepared by N.J. PEOSH. Covers committee structure, functions, activities, running a meeting, and Do's and Don'ts. Includes checklists for committee structure and activities. Request this free PEOSH publication by calling 609-984-1863. Also available online at www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/jlmib.htm

– Guide to Effective Joint Labor/Management Safety and Health Committees

60 pages. Prepared by N.J. PEOSH. The guide is designed for existing committee members as well as those interested in forming a committee. It is organized in eight stages that, if followed, should lead to establishment of an effective committee within six months. Appendices include Employee Hazard Report Form, Health and Safety Program Components, Walkthrough Inspection Worksheet, and Job Hazards Evaluation Form.

Available online at www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/peoshweb/jlmhsc.pdf