FEBRUARY
SAFETY TALK

Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committees

According to the *Workers Compensation Act*, there must be a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) wherever 20 or more workers are regularly employed. In addition, if a municipality has a fire department, there must be a separate JOHSC for that department.

In a medium-sized municipality, this would likely require a minimum of four committees: Fire, Public Works, Municipal Hall and Recreation. Many municipalities will also have a "central committee" whose membership is the co-chairs from the departmental committees.

It is possible to request a variance from your local WorkSafeBC Officer to have fewer committees, but approval of the variance is not always given and is provided less and less frequently.

JOHSC's play a crucial role in the health and safety program in your organization. Recent changes to the *Workers Compensation Act* and the WorkSafeBC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, have strengthened their responsibilities and influence on the safety program, through requirements to consult or participate in various program elements.

RULES OF PROCEDURE
(aka Terms of Reference)

The responsibilities of the JOHSC are laid out in the *Workers Compensation Act*, Part 3, Division 4, Section 130. Words like "consult", "advise", "ensure" and "make recommendations" highlight key roles these committees should play in your organization.

A key management responsibility to the JOHSC's is to ensure all staff are aware of who the committee members are. Posting their names (and possibly pictures) on bulletin boards can help. Recognizing committee members in staff events and internal communication is another way to highlight who these members are.

Any new committee member must receive a minimum of eight hours of designated training, within the first six months of their appointment to the committee. WorkSafeBC has identified what this training must include. Contact the BCMSA for further information on the JOHSC Fundamentals course.

In addition, every committee member (new or not), must be given the opportunity to take an additional eight hours of training, every year.

This training should assist them in their roles on the safety committees, such as courses in:

- Incident investigations
- Worksite safety inspections
- Hazard identification and risk assessments
- Ergonomics
- Office safety

The list goes on and on.

The committee should be consulted with respect to what training will be offered. There is no restriction on what the training will be, but the committee must approve of the training.

Every year, the JOHSC must evaluate their effectiveness. There is a simple process to follow posted on the BCMSA website. In addition to committee members evaluating how they are doing, each Co-Chair must evaluate whether or not the Committees are meeting their legislated requirements under the *Workers Compensation Act*. A tool for this is also on the website.

If you see an unsafe condition - fix it. If you can't fix it, tell your supervisor, who is responsible for fixing it without delay. If your supervisor is unable to fix it, then the issue should be brought to the JOHSC for discussion and resolve.

British Columbia Municipal Safety Association

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