

Establishing and maintaining effective safety consultation in construction

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland



Introduction

Establishing and maintaining effective safety consultation in construction is important to ensure workplace health and safety practices are followed by the principal contractor, employers and workers.

The following model safety committee charter and associated guidance information have been developed in consultation with industry safety professionals from:

- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland
- Master Builders Queensland
- Builders Labourers Federation
- Watpac Australia Pty Ltd
- Abigroup/QR S2K Alliance.

This guide will assist workplaces to:

- Develop a charter for a workplace safety committee which provides equal ownership and responsibility to workers, committee members, employers and principal contractors.
- Conduct effective safety committee meetings by:
 - maximising the use of meeting time to work collaboratively and proactively
 - encouraging and maintaining regular attendance by committee members
 - providing an educational element of the meeting (e.g. discussing new safety products or legislation).

- Involve rank and file workers more in safety.
- Offer ongoing encouragement from principal contactors and employers to host workplace forums for innovation in safety (e.g. staff competitions/awards).
- Ensure meeting outcomes are actioned by a specific date and committee members are allocated for nominated tasks.

Further information

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Website: www.deir.qld.gov.au

Telephone: 1300 369 915

Disclaimer

The materials presented in this publication are distributed by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations as an information source only.

The information and data in this publication is subject to change without notice. The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations makes no statements, representations, or warranties about the accuracy or completeness of, and you should not rely on, any information contained in this publication. This document is a guide only and must be read in conjunction with the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*.

© The State of Queensland (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations) August 2007.

Contents

- Model safety committee charter 2
 - Introduction 2
 - Authority 2
 - Objectives 2
 - Composition..... 2
 - Chairperson..... 3
 - Functions 3
 - Meetings 5
 - Attendance..... 7
 - Non-consensus 7
 - Review 7

- Safety consultation in construction 8
 - Information for principal contractors.....10
 - Information for workplace health and safety representatives (WHSR) 11
 - Information for safety committee members13
 - Information for workplace health and safety officers (WHSO)16

Model safety committee charter

Introduction

As per s86 of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* (the Act), the principal contractor for a project must establish a workplace health and safety committee (committee). The committee is guided by the following charter and, where relevant, in conjunction with the occupational health and safety management system currently being used by the principal contractor.

Authority

This charter sets out the specific responsibilities delegated by the principal contractor to the committee, and provides support for the manner in which the committee will operate.

Objectives

The primary objective of the committee is to assist the principal contractor and relevant employers to meet their obligations, with particular regard to the following areas:

- Maintaining and applying appropriate health and safety procedures.
- Providing a forum to discuss health and safety matters between the committee, principal contractor, relevant employers and workers.

Composition

As per s87 of the Act, the committee should comprise not less than two members.

The members should be:

- any workplace health and safety officer (WHSO) and workplace health and safety representative (WHSR), for the workplace; and
- other members negotiated by the relevant employers, the principal contractor and workers at the workplace.

A committee member must be an employer, principal contractor or worker at the workplace and at least half of the committee members must be workers, other than those nominated by the employer or principal contractor.

Chairperson

The chairperson of the committee (Chair) should be a person who is a senior member of the principal contractor project management team, and be in a position to make binding decisions on behalf of the principal contractor. Generally, the committee meetings should be facilitated by the Chair, but in some instances, the Chair may invite another committee member to facilitate the running of a meeting (e.g. a member of the project management team). In all circumstances, the Chair (not the meeting facilitator) is the only committee member who can make any binding decisions arising from the meetings.

Functions

The functions of the committee may include the following:

- Providing advice and information, as appropriate, to the principal contractor or relevant employers regarding workplace health and safety at the workplace.
- Monitoring work activities and reporting non-compliance with established safety procedures to the principal contractor.

- Considering measures for safety training and educational programmes.
- Assessing any significant incidents referred to the committee for review and make recommendations arising from the review.
- The principal contractor, in conjunction with the committee, should examine the most appropriate communication strategies to ensure safety information is provided to workers on site. Communication strategies may include:
 - tool box talks
 - use of site notice boards
 - special briefings with work groups or work areas
 - full site meetings (if deemed necessary by the principal contractor)
 - any other communication strategies deemed necessary.

Any communication strategies undertaken by workplace health and safety committees should be structured to support the following functions outlined in the Act, s90(3).

At the workplace:

- Encourage and maintain an active interest in workplace health and safety issues.
- Consider measures for training and educating persons about workplace health and safety issues.
- Inform workers about the formulation, review and distribution of standards, rules and procedures about workplace health and safety.

Meetings

The frequency of meetings is to be determined by the Chair, in consultation with the committee, to allow the committee to fulfil its objectives (see 'Objectives' on previous page). The frequency of the meetings should be determined by the following factors:

- the number of different trades/subcontractors on site
- the number of workers on site
- the size and complexity of the project
- the amount of high risk activities being carried out on site
- if the high risk activities of one work group have a direct effect on others.

All meetings should have an agenda to which committee members, principal contractor, relevant employers and site workers have been given the opportunity to contribute.

All meetings should be conducted in a standard format that should include, but is not limited to, the following items:

- Discussing the aims of the committee and committee processes with new members.
- Recording the time the meeting commenced.
- Recording those present (including visitors).
- Recording apologies and non-attendance.
- Recording nomination of acceptance of previous minutes being a true and correct record of the meeting (record the nominators' name and the seconders' name).
- Completed action items from the previous meeting/s (including action officers' names and agreed timeframes).

- Outstanding action items from the previous meeting/s (including action officers' names and agreed timeframes).
- General and other business.
- Action items arising from the meeting (including action officers' names and agreed timeframes).
- Review of safety-related incidents on site.
- Update on any upcoming programming issues which may have an effect on health and safety, for example:
 - new high risk construction activities
 - new tower crane being erected
 - dual or specialised crane lifting
 - changes in access to and around site
 - changes which may affect members of the public.
- Details of the next meeting (time, date, venue etc).
- Recording the time the meeting concluded.

The Chair is required to call an additional meeting of the committee, if requested to do so by a WHSO, or as a result of a significant incident.

A person designated by the Chair should maintain minutes of the committee meetings.

These minutes should be:

- signed by the Chair
- available for distribution within 48 hours of each meeting
- made available in common areas throughout the project (e.g. notice boards, first aid room, crib room, offices).

Attendance

All nominated committee members should attend all scheduled meetings. If members are unable to attend a meeting, they should send a proxy in their place. The proxy should be a person who has an understanding of previous issues raised through the committee on the project. The proxy arrangement should not exceed more than three meetings in a row, after which time the committee member will be removed from the committee and the situation reviewed.

Any committee member may nominate an external person to attend a meeting as a visitor. If agreed upon by members, this person may attend committee meetings, but is not entitled to vote under any circumstances. The visitor should have the necessary qualifications, skills and knowledge to provide positive, safety-related input into the committee meetings and provide information within the context of the agenda and discussion items.

Non-consensus

When the committee is unable to reach an agreement on an issue, the Chair must inform the principal contractor. The principal contractor should determine whether the matter can be resolved internally or by seeking independent advice. This independent advice may come from relevant safety professionals, such as representatives from Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ).

Review

The committee charter should be reviewed at intervals agreed upon by the committee and revised as required.

For more information, contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 369 915 or visit: www.deir.qld.gov.au.

Safety consultation in construction

The roles that the workplace health and safety representative (WHSR), workplace health and safety officer (WHSO), and workplace health and safety committee members play in the building and construction industry are crucial to ensuring and improving health and safety on worksites.

If a business employs any of the groups above, the following information may be used as a guide to help the consultative process work to its full potential.

This information should be read in conjunction with the model safety committee charter.

There are separate sections for each group who play a part in the project management team.

If you are any of the following, please go to the relevant section for further information:

- Employers (see page 8).
- Principal contractors (see page 10).
- Workplace health and safety representatives (see page 11).
- Safety committee members (see page 13).
- Workplace health and safety officers (see page 16).

Information for employers

Employers need to:

- Have a personal commitment toward safety and the continuous improvement of safety systems and processes on the project.

- Have good knowledge of safety legislation, the roles and functions of a safety representative, safety officer, safety committee members and consultative arrangements generally.
- Provide support to the safety representative, safety officer and safety committee members when they hold meetings, carry out inspections and when they are required to attend necessary training.
- Assist the safety representative, safety officer and safety committee members to access technical support from other sources, including Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors.
- Ensure all work method statements, for any high risk construction activities undertaken on the project, are forwarded to the principal contractor prior to the commencement of the activities.
- Attend safety committee meetings, if required.
- Communicate with the safety representative, safety officer and safety committee members on safety information, relevant to the project.
- Undertake training and attend information seminars to maintain safety skills and knowledge.
- Understand the process for conducting risk assessments, evaluating control methods and work method statements.
- Ensure safety representatives and safety committee members are active participants in the consultative arrangements.
- Ensure safety representatives and safety committee members are allocated enough time to be able to conduct their functions effectively.

Information for principal contractors

Principal contractors need to:

- Have a commitment toward safety in the industry and the continuous improvement of safety systems and processes on the project.
- Have good knowledge of safety legislation, the roles and functions of a safety officer, safety representative and safety committee members and general consultative arrangements.
- Provide support to the safety officer, safety representatives and safety committee members when they hold meetings, carry out inspections, or are required to attend necessary training.
- Assist the safety officer, safety representative and safety committee members to access technical support from other sources, including Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors.
- Work with the safety officer to review work method statements and monitor subsequent work activities, to ensure workers are complying with safety requirements.
- Attend safety committee meetings, if required.
- Communicate with the safety officer, safety representative and safety committee members on safety information, relevant to the project.
- Undertake training and attend information seminars to maintain safety skills and knowledge.
- Have the skills and knowledge to be able to participate in meetings and the safety committee.

- Understand the process for conducting risk assessments, evaluating control methods and work method statements.
- Have an understanding of the principles of basic investigations into workplace incidents, to assist in identifying causes of incidents and corrective action to improve safety.
- Ensure the safety officer, safety representative and safety committee members are allocated enough time to be able to conduct their functions effectively.

Information for workplace health and safety representatives (WHSR)

Safety representatives need to:

- Have a personal commitment toward safety in the industry and the continuous improvement of safety systems and procedures on the project.
- Be well-respected by their peers.
- Have good knowledge of, or take the opportunity to get training in, safety legislation, construction practices and the roles and functions of a safety representative and general consultative arrangements.
- Be able to identify personal limitations and willing to seek advice, when necessary.

Safety representatives need to be supported by:

- Employer and fellow workers.
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors and access to other technical support people.

The roles and responsibilities of the safety representatives are to:

- Identify and nominate safety issues for the safety committee to discuss and action.
- Assist employers to meet safety obligations.
- Undertake regular inspections of relevant work areas.
- Attend every committee meeting, where possible, on projects, where the safety representative is also a safety committee member.
- Communicate with fellow workers on safety information, relevant to the project.

Safety representatives should have the following information, training and skills:

- Completed a basic form of safety awareness training as a minimum.
- Undertaken training and attend information seminars, to ensure skills are kept up-to-date and knowledge remains current.
- Be able to participate in meetings and the safety committee, if also a safety committee member.
- Good communication skills.
- An understanding of the process for conducting risk assessments, evaluating control methods and work procedures.
- An understanding of the principles of basic investigations into workplace incidents.
- Up-to-date information from the principal contractor and employers of changes to the workplace, plant or substances used at the workplace.

Information for safety committee members

Safety committee members need to:

- Have a personal commitment to safety and consultative arrangements.
- Have a good understanding of, or the opportunity to get training in, safety legislation, specifically in regard to workplace consultative arrangements.
- Have a good understanding of protocols and processes associated with committee meetings.
- Be well-respected by the principal contractor, workers and employers.
- Be easily identified by site workers (e.g. different coloured hard hats/clothing).
- Ensure committee meetings are attended by members.
- Ensure workers are aware of and support the activities of the committee.
- Be well informed of current safety legislation, as required.

Safety committee members need to be supported by:

- Both the principal contractor and employers.
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors.

An effective safety committee structure should include the following:

- Ensure members of the committee are people working in activities which potentially have a high risk profile on the project (e.g. formworkers, scaffolders, steelfixers, electricians and plumbers).
- Have a chairperson and secretary/scribe for each meeting.

- Have a member representing the principal contractor who holds a position and is capable of making decisions in relation to site activities. This committee member should have authority delegated by the principal contractor to issue 'site instructions' (e.g. project manager, site manager, safety officer).
- Ensure that the minutes do not include items of a trivial nature, particularly those that can be rectified quickly and without the intervention of the principal contractor (e.g. one extension lead found with three-monthly inspection tag missing), and contain sufficient detail to facilitate appropriate corrective action.
- Have a constitution/charter that is supported by the principal contractor and relevant employers.
- Ensure minutes are signed off by a designated person and distributed within 48 hours after each meeting. The minutes should have action items, close out timeframes, and action officers allocated.
- Ensure members of the committee, who are also elected safety representatives, use Form 4 (available from the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations website www.deir.qld.gov.au or by calling 1300 369 915), or equivalent forms for reporting hazards, where applicable.

The roles and responsibilities of safety committee members are to:

- Ensure that committee members, who are also elected safety representatives, undertake regular focused inspections within their area of representation.
- Ensure good, open lines of communication between all areas of the project and workers in order to promote programming and coordination of work activities.

- Ensure information applicable to safety is promptly communicated around the workplace and in an appropriate manner for the project.
- Promote and project a strong culture of continuous improvement in relation to safety.

Safety committee members should have the following information, training and skills:

- An understanding of the ‘committee process’, including the committees’ constitution/charter, if applicable, and general consultative arrangements. The details of this process can be discussed and agreed upon at the first committee meeting.
- A knowledge of, and be kept informed of, project progress and programming.
- The ability to review work procedures for high risk construction activities which may impact on their individual work areas.
- The ability to provide and promote safety-related information to workers in the most appropriate manner for the project.

Information for workplace health and safety officers (WHSO)

Safety officers need to:

- Have a personal commitment toward safety in the industry and the continuous improvement of safety systems and processes on the project.
- Be well-respected by the principal contractor, workers and employers.
- Have good knowledge of safety legislation, construction practices, the roles and functions of a safety officer and general consultative arrangements.
- Be able to identify their own limitations and seek assistance on matters when necessary.
- Have good communication skills.

Safety officers need to be supported by:

- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors and other technical support people.
- The principal contractor, employers and workers.

The roles and responsibilities of the safety officer are to:

- Assist in reviewing construction safety plans, work method statements and work procedures, prior to commencing work activities in consultation with the principal contractor and safety representative.
- Assist the principal contractor and employers to develop relevant safety documentation, as required.

- Monitor work activities and project progress, identifying safety issues in the planning stage, and liaising with the principal contractor and others, in order to minimise risk.
- Undertake safety inspections relevant to improving and monitoring site safety standards.
- Assist the principal contractor in the coordination and facilitation of safety committee meetings.
- Report, in writing, to the employer or principal contractor, any hazard, unsafe or unsatisfactory workplace health and safety practice, identified during inspection, as per s 96(c) of the Act.

Safety officers should:

- Hold a minimum qualification for a safety officer.
- Undertake training and attend information seminars to ensure skills are kept up-to-date and knowledge remains current.
- Be competent at conducting risk assessments and evaluating control methods, construction safety plans and work procedures.
- Be able to conduct basic investigations into workplace incidents, in order to identify causes and implement corrective actions to improve safety.
- Be kept informed by the principal contractor and employers of changes to the workplace, work activities and plant or substances used at the workplace.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Telephone: 1300 369 915

Website: www.deir.qld.gov.au

DEIR/07/2704_V1.07
