

## **CWA Occupational Safety and Health Fact Sheet #9**

### **Forming CWA Local Occupational Safety and Health Committees**

The creation and development of CWA Local Union Occupational Safety and Health Committees should be viewed as a vital ingredient to the overall functioning of the Union. The committees' activities should ensure that CWA members work under safe and healthful working conditions. This would be accomplished by making sure that the employer is complying with its legal responsibility -- to provide a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.

If the local union occupational safety and health committee should find that a work hazard exists, it should bring the problem to the attention of the employer. If the employer does not correct the problem, the local union occupational safety and health committee should notify the appropriate and responsible person or persons within the local union who has/have the authority to take and/or authorize the required action. Ideally, this/these individual(s) (as well as members of the safety and health committee) should try to work within the collective bargaining structure to resolve the identified problem(s). If the employer still refuses to remedy the situation, as a last resort, the local union officers or committee members should file a grievance with the employer and/or file a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or state equivalent.

It should be pointed out that the utilization of OSHA might bring lengthy delays in solving the problem. In addition, use of OSHA may tend to lessen the local's effectiveness in the eyes of the members and the employers. Thus, as noted, the local's occupational safety and health committee should work within the existing collective bargaining framework to resolve identified workplace safety and health problems and concerns.

#### **Forming the Committee**

Every CWA local should have a strong, active occupational safety and health committee. This should be a goal of each local. Indeed, only as a result of the creation and development of such a committee can CWA help ensure that represented employers are providing our members with safe and healthful workplaces.

Ideally, the local union occupational safety and health committee should include members who are able to provide adequate representation of the varied type(s) of work performed by the Union's members. Thus, in part, the size of the committee should be based upon the number and size of represented employers, the different type of work/work functions performed by CWA members, and the geographic coverage of the local union.

Active local union occupational safety and health committees will help to increase members' awareness and enthusiasm for recognizing and controlling workplace safety health problems. To help achieve this, the committee members should develop and conduct training and education programs that emphasize safe work practices and procedures as well as methods of resolving identified safety and health hazards. In addition, committee members should develop their knowledge and skills in order that they can function as the local union information center on occupational safety and health. Such work would include developing the knowledge and general

responsibility necessary to represent members specific to workplace safety and health issues as well as ensuring that represented employers are providing members with safe and healthful working conditions. Thus, when appointing or electing members to serve on the local union's safety and health committee, look for responsible, sincere, outgoing members who are both willing to learn how to best protect the interests of their fellow workers as well as display a willingness to make sure that the employer(s) is/are adhering to its/their legal responsibilities.

Local union occupational safety and health committees should meet at least once a month. Emergency meetings should be held as necessary. Such a meeting schedule will allow the committee to adequately respond to the requests of the local's officers and address the needs of the Union's members.

The local union occupational safety and health committee should build an information and resource center. Such a center should contain:

- A review of accident, injury, illness and fatality reports; workers' compensation claims; absenteeism records; and employee grievance and arbitration cases concerned with occupational safety and health,
- An up-to-date recordkeeping system. Such a system should include reports and investigations related to all safety and health issues that the local union committee addresses. Fortunately, much of this information can be obtained directly from the employer. Employers with more than 10 workers are required by OSHA to maintain a record of accident, injury, illness, and fatality reports. The committee should request and use such information in their training and education as well as hazard identification and resolution activities.
- Pertinent publications from OSHA, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (OSHRC), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and relevant state government agencies. These can be obtained by contacting the particular agency office nearest you. These occupational safety and health organizations can supply the committee with a list of publications and put the committee on their mailing lists. In addition, in order that the committee is able to obtain and acquire technical information and assistance, it is a good idea to develop a positive, friendly relationship with personnel in these governmental organizations.
- Publications from other unions, coalitions on occupational safety and health (COSH groups), universities and colleges, and other supportive organizations.

CWA local union occupational safety and health committees should ensure that they have an open communication system. This means providing information to other local union committees, CWA national officers and staff, and the CWA Occupational Safety and Health Department.

### **What the Committee Should Be Concerned With**

The local union occupational safety and health committee should be concerned with any condition which threatens the safety and/or health of CWA members. Potential hazards might include:

- Safety Hazards - unguarded machinery, machinery in need of maintenance, inadequate or unmarked emergency exits, poor lighting, electrical hazards, and mishandling of explosives or flammable substances.
- Health Hazards – vapors and fumes; dust; excessive heat or cold; noise and vibration; chemical exposures and spills; radiation; musculoskeletal/repetitive motion injuries and illnesses; and physical, psychosocial, and psychological stress.

The local union occupational safety and health committee may also want to consider other problems such as:

- Is enough time allowed to do each task safely?
- Is excessive overtime work causing fatigue that could contribute to accidents?
- Are workers reluctant to report hazards for fear of punishment or of being transferred to other jobs at lower pay levels?
- Are there large numbers of illnesses or health problems that could be related to exposure to a workplace substance?

### **What Can You Do?**

All CWA members should make sure their employer is maintaining a safe and healthful workplace. The key to making the workplace safe for all CWA members is strong, active local union occupational safety and health committees. The committees can identify dangerous working conditions and discuss them with management. If the employer refuses to resolve the safety and/or health hazard(s), the committee can request an OSHA inspection. The committee should always coordinate its activities through the local officers, the CWA representatives, and negotiated safety and health committees.

In addition, CWA members may obtain information and assistance by contacting the:

CWA Occupational Safety and Health Department

501 Third Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20001-2797

Webpage: [www.cwasafetyandhealth.org](http://www.cwasafetyandhealth.org)

Phone: (202) 434-1160

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