

Joint health and safety committees

Frequently asked questions

When is a joint health and safety committee needed?

A workplace needs a joint health and safety committee if it has 20 or more workers employed at the workplace for longer than a month. WorkSafeBC may also order that a joint committee be established in any other workplace.

If a workplace has more than 9 but fewer than 20 workers, a worker health and safety representative is needed.

Who should be on the joint committee?

A joint committee must have at least four members, and at least half of the members must be worker representatives. A worker representative must be someone who does not have a managerial role — someone who does not participate in the overall direction at the workplace, discipline workers, or represent management in labour relations matters.

Worker representatives on the committee must be selected as follows:

- According to procedures established by the union if the workers are unionized

- By secret ballot if the workers are not unionized
- Using the above methods if some workers are unionized and some are not, in equal proportion to the number of unionized and non-unionized workers, and according to the level of risk
- Assigned by the employer if workers do not make their own selection

Employer representatives must be selected by the employer. Where possible, employer representatives must include people who have managerial functions at the workplace. Owners and executives can act as employer representatives.

If no joint committee exists at a workplace, how is a new one created?

Once the worker and employer representatives are selected, the committee must set its rules of procedure, which can also be called terms of reference. These rules set out how the committee will perform its duties and functions. The rules also state how often the committee meets, which must be regularly and at least once a month.

Do committee members need special training?

All new joint committee members must receive at least eight hours of training on the following topics:

- Duties and functions of a joint committee
- Rules of procedure
- Accident and incident investigations
- Workplace inspections
- Refusal of unsafe work
- Joint committee annual evaluation

Training must be received as soon as possible after the member is selected, and no more than six months after they become a committee member.

Committee members are also entitled to eight hours of leave each year to attend occupational health and safety training courses.

What does the committee do?

The joint committee plays an important role in the workplace occupational health and safety program, giving workers and employers a way to work together to identify health and safety issues and find solutions.

The duties and functions of the joint committee are to:

- Identify situations that may be unhealthy or unsafe for workers and advise on effective systems for responding to those situations
- Consider and promptly deal with complaints relating to the health and safety of workers
- Consult with workers and the employer on specific issues and procedures related to

occupational health and safety (e.g., first aid assessment, working alone procedures, exposure control plans)

- Make recommendations to the employer for improving occupational health and safety
- Make recommendations to the employer on educational programs promoting the health and safety of workers and compliance with regulatory requirements
- Advise the employer on programs and policies required under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, and monitor their effectiveness
- Advise the employer on proposed changes to the workplace, including significant proposed changes to equipment and machinery, or the work processes that may affect the health or safety of workers
- Participate in inspections, investigations, and inquiries, including employer incident investigations and investigations into a worker's refusal of unsafe work

What is the committee's role in workplace inspections?

A workplace inspection must, where possible, include the participation of members of the joint committee.

Employers are responsible for making sure regular inspections are made of all workplaces, including buildings, structures, grounds, excavations, tools, equipment, machinery, and work methods and practices. These inspections must take place at intervals that will prevent unsafe working conditions from developing.

What is the committee's role in investigating workplace incidents?

Employers must conduct a preliminary and a full investigation of specific workplace incidents (refer to [section 69](#) of the Act). A worker representative from the joint committee must, if they are reasonably available, participate in both the preliminary and full incident investigations.

Participation in the employer's incident investigation includes:

- Viewing the scene of the incident with the persons carrying out the investigation
- Providing advice about the methods used to carry out the investigation, the scope of the investigation, or any other aspect of the investigation

- Assisting the persons carrying out the investigation with:
 - Gathering information relating to the investigation
 - Analyzing the information gathered during the investigation
 - Identifying any corrective actions necessary to prevent recurrence of similar incidents

The role of the worker representative in the employer's incident investigation is to advise, assist, and witness the investigation. The joint committee supports the investigators by providing a different view about the nature of the work and the work environment.

Where can I find more information?

Visit our [Joint health & safety committees and worker health & safety representatives](#) page on worksafebc.com for more information and resources.