



A SAFETY AND HEALTH FACT SHEET

Fifteen Things

Every Union Leader Should Know About Safety and Health

- 1) The twin goals of a union safety and health program are to improve working conditions and to build the union. They are equally important. In fact, you can't do either one well unless you do both.
- 2) Management has different goals, even enlightened management. They may care about safety in its own right, but are probably more concerned about workers comp costs. And building the union is never one of management's goals.
- 3) What you do with the company on safety and health is a form of collective bargaining. Even if you don't see it that way, they do.
- 4) Safety and health isn't a technical issue. Technical knowledge helps. But there are plenty of places to get technical information. Strategy and organization are much more important.
- 5) Every local union needs a union safety and health committee. You should set one up even if you don't have a joint safety and health committee. You don't need the employer's permission to establish a union committee.
- 6) It's also good to have a joint safety and health committee, with representatives from the union and from management. The joint committee is a good way to resolve safety and health problems.
- 7) Even if you have a joint committee, you still need a union committee. The union committee can be the union reps on the joint committee, or a larger group.
- 8) The union members of the joint committee should meet by themselves as often as they meet with management. You need separate meetings to set union priorities and plan strategy. Can you imagine what would happen if your bargaining committee met only with the company at contract time, and never by itself?

- 9) You should never, ever, allow the company to appoint your safety and health reps, to veto the union's choices, or dismiss your reps from their union positions. Never. Ever.
- 10) Union safety reps should think of themselves as organizers, promoting safety and health in a way that builds the loyalty and commitment of your membership. That means involving the membership whenever you can. And it means good communication with your membership, both written and by word of mouth.
- 11) "Behavior" contributes to some accidents. But hazards cause all of them. And it is easier to fix hazards than to change human nature.
- 12) Safety programs that focus on behavior tell our members that they are the problem. In fact, our members and their union are the solution.
- 13) The best way to find hazards is for union safety and health reps to talk to every worker about his or her job, and how to make it safer and easier. It's even better to enlist that member in pushing for improvements.
- 14) And what's the best way to build the union through safety and health? See # 13, above.
- 15) You're not alone. You have lots of resources through the USW. Every district has a safety and health coordinator. Our International Health, Safety, and Environment Department is available for help by phone, fax, email, or mail.

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