



Workers are the most important source of information on workplace hazards. A survey is one way of getting this crucial information from workers who may be dealing directly with potential health and safety concerns in the workplace.

Getting ready to carry out a survey

A survey can be carried out solely by the union's health and safety representative, but it is easier to carry out if you have the employer's support. With the employer on board, distribution, filling out the surveys, and collection can be done on work time which will improve the chances of worker participation.

Checklist: Should we hold a joint survey with the employer?

The following conditions should be met and guaranteed in writing with the employer before you proceed on conducting a joint survey with the employer:

The employer and the union have a full and agreed-upon understanding that the purpose of the survey is to identify hazards that may cause injury or illness.

The employer and the union agree on the questions being asked.

It has been agreed that health and safety committee members, representatives or other union activists will distribute and collect the survey on work time.

The survey design and implementation ensure that participants are not identified and their responses are kept confidential.

The employer will not receive any hard copies of the survey or raw data. The employer will only receive summarized results so that individual worker confidentiality can be assured.

Results of the survey will be shared with all employees.

If the above conditions are not met, or the employer does not support the idea of a survey, then the union local should proceed with its own survey. This survey would need to be done outside of work hours, requiring more time to ensure that everyone has a chance to complete the survey. The union health and safety committee or the local union executive can assist with developing the survey and distributing it to members.

Once the survey is developed and approved, the health and safety committee should draft a letter explaining the purpose of the survey and provide contact info for workers who have questions. If the survey is being done in collaboration with the employer, ensure that the letter contains information about the time available during work hours to complete the survey attached work.

Best practices for communicating with workers as a health and safety committee or representative

DO WORKERS MAKE SUGGESTIONS TO HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBERS OR REPRESENTATIVES?

When workers regularly make suggestions to committee members or representatives, it shows that the communication channels are open and working the way they should. To maintain this, any worker who raises health or safety matters should get a response. When follow-up action is delayed, a report explaining the reasons should be given to the worker who raised the concern. Committee members and representatives should encourage input from workers by providing prompt feedback on all suggestions and ideas.

WHEN A RECOMMENDATION IS NOT IMPLEMENTED, ARE THE FULL REASONS GIVEN TO THE COMMITTEE?

There may be valid reasons why committee recommendations are not implemented immediately. A delay may occur when new equipment must be ordered, construction is involved, or financial authorization is needed.

After management has considered the proposal, the reasons for not being able to meet the recommendations should be given. The health and safety committee or representative and the employer can then work together to find an alternative solution to the issue. Some jurisdictions require these reasons to be documented in writing and to be done within a specific period (e.g. 30 days). Failure to reply accurately and within the specified time can lead to misunderstandings and a perception that management lacks a commitment to safety.

IS THE FULL RECORD OF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS, THEIR IMPLEMENTATION, AND REASONS FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION AVAILABLE TO ALL WORKERS?

In order to maintain a high degree of safety awareness throughout the workplace, all workers should be kept informed on any health and safety issues and their suggested solutions. Comprehensive minutes, personal contact with representatives or committee members, and reports at union and management meetings will all help to share this information. Committee successes, such as when recommendations are implemented and accepted by management, should be publicized.

Developing the survey

When developing the survey, consider referencing the list of possible hazards that are present in the workplace.

Information can be collected either through a written questionnaire distributed to workers or through one-on-one interviews (oral surveys). A written survey may be appropriate if the worker wants to include sensitive information because the form won't identify the specific example. A worker may be reluctant to voice specific concerns directly to a union representative, but may be more willing to describe the problem in an anonymous questionnaire. One-on-one interviews can be very useful for organizing the membership as it gets people talking about jobs and working conditions, and introduces union leaders to rank and file members.

Maximizing participation

Task individual health and safety representatives or committee members with distributing the survey to specific areas, departments, or units. To ensure that people fill out the form, limit the response time to a few days. Have the same person who distributed the forms follow up on any incomplete forms and organize the collection of the completed surveys. Prior to introducing a survey into the workplace,

whether the employer is involved or not, it is a good idea to have a special union meeting to describe the purpose of the survey, how results will be used, how it will be distributed to members, confidentiality, and to task people with specific roles in assisting with the survey. You should also reach out to your union representative and/or PSAC regional health and safety representative when developing the survey for additional support and guidance.

Best practices for surveys

The best survey is one that has been developed for your workplace's specific needs. It is always good practice to identify hazards and do a risk assessment to help find, identify, and prioritize the hazards in your workplace.

Surveys have been very useful in improving work environments, such as temperature, ventilation, indoor air quality, shared workspaces, and other physical conditions of the workplace. They have also been used to identify shift scheduling issues, workload, telework, and psychological stressors, among others.