



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 cooperative management. They may genuinely care about safety itself, but are probably more concerned about productivity, budgets, and workers compensation costs. Not to mention that building the union is *never* one of management's goals!
- 3** What you do with management on safety and health is a form of collective bargaining. Even if you don't see it that way, *they* do. Know your rights under PEF/NYS Contract Article 18 and the Taylor Law.
- 4** Strategy and organization are more important than technical information. Safety and Health isn't a technical issue. Technical knowledge helps, but there are plenty of places to get technical information such as bringing in a PEF H&S Staff or consultant to address a specific item at your committee meeting.
- 5** Every division and worksite should have a safety and health committee. Article 18 provides for a joint committee to be established at the statewide, agency, and local levels.
- 6** 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.
- 7** Be sure the committee meets at least quarterly, as required by Article 18. Most importantly, have the union committee meet separately *prior* to the joint committee meeting. You can't present a united front to management if your own team hasn't come to agreement on all issues. If there are multiple bargaining units at the site, then collaboration among the unions is critical.
- 8** The union members of the joint committee should meet by themselves as often, if not more, than 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 State, and never by themselves, at contract time?

9 The union has the right to appoint their own representatives to the committee. You should *never, ever*, allow management to appoint your safety and health representatives, 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. It is far 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 identify hazards is for union safety and health reps to talk to workers about his or her job, and how to make it safer and easier. It is even better to enlist that member to push for improvements.

14 What is the best way to build the union through safety and health? See #13, above.

15 You are not alone. You have a lot of resources through PEF. Every agency has a statewide Health and Safety Chairperson, and the PEF Health & Safety Department is available for help by phone, fax, e-mail or conventional mail.

Upon request, the PEF Health & Safety Department will provide factsheets, standards, regulations, and other resources. Contact us at 518-785-1900, ext. 254 or 1-800-342-4306, ext. 254. P.O. Box 12414, Albany, New York, 12212-2414. Also, visit our webpage at www.pef.org.

This factsheet was modified from one developed by the USWA International Health, Safety and Environment Department, www.uswa.org.

Funded in part by a NYS Hazard Abatement Board OSH T&E Grant.

Produced by the New York State Public Employees Federation

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