

What OHS Committees get wrong

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Ever wondered what OHS committees most commonly do wrong? Two workplace safety experts outline the two most widespread mistakes they have witnessed and discuss what should be happening.

Marian Moffatt and Natasha White, OHS auditors with the NSW Business Chamber, believe workplace safety can actually be impeded when an organisation's OHS committee is not functioning properly.

They told WorkplaceOHS that in their visits to worksites they have come across two recurring problems with the committees' operation and role within companies.

Firstly, committees can become 'too focused' on hazard identification and not enough on workplace safety systems.

According to Moffatt and Kilbane, this can lead to a 'spot-fire' mindset, where the committee is being largely reactive, rather than risk-assessing the OHS issue across the whole organisation.

For example, a worker may complain of a pain relating to a manual handling issue. However, simply addressing that particular worker's complaint is not enough, and the company should in fact re-assess its manual handling policy and procedures and make sure risk assessments on machinery are up to date.

You're not Clint Eastwood

According to Moffatt and White, the second most common OHS committee problem is related to the committee members' role within the company.

They say many committee members often believe they are actually workplace safety 'enforcers', and attempt to direct or admonish workers on OHS practices.

But, in fact, members should be there in an 'advisory role', Moffatt and White say, leaving the enforcement to line managers and supervisors.

If a committee member notices a worker wearing inappropriate footwear, for example, they should report the issue to the worker's manager, advise them of what is appropriate, and then the manager should be the person to approach and direct the worker.