

# Facts about Health & Safety Committees

## GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Local associations that want better working conditions in the areas of health and safety need to organize. Organizing has proven to be the only practice that works in dealing with the unreliability of waiting for school districts and government agencies to do the right thing. Here is the NJEA 10-step organizing approach for effective local association health and safety programs.

- 1 Commit:** Make membership health and safety a priority. Enlist the assistance of your UniServ field representative.
- 2 Organize:** Form a local association health and safety committee. Establish a process to receive and respond to hazards and health problems.
- 3 Research:** Examine district injury and illness logs. Review district health and safety procedures. Check whether the district is in compliance with Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) requirements.
- 4 Document:** Survey members. Conduct walk-through evaluations. Take photos or videos. Use checklists.
- 5 Educate:** Use the NJEA Health and Safety Manual. Distribute NJEA fact sheets. Hold training sessions. Show videos. Keep the membership informed and involved.
- 6 Assist:** Assist sick and injured workers with treatment and compensation.
- 7 Problem solve:** Prioritize problems and identify solutions. Pick winnable issues. Ask the district to implement solutions. Follow up to make sure changes are made.
- 8 Mobilize:** Enlist the help of parents, students, community groups, elected officials, activist groups, the media, etc.
- 9 Negotiate:** Negotiate and enforce contract language on health and safety.
- 10 Use PEOSH:** File PEOSH complaints when necessary. Know what is regulated and what is not. Participate in inspections.

### HEALTH & SAFETY RESOURCES

Your NJEA UniServ Office

Region 1 – Galloway Twp. Atlantic/  
609 652 9200 Cape May

Region 2 – Mullica Hill Cumberland/  
856 628 8650 Gloucester/Salem

Region 3 – Voorhees Burlington  
856 234 2485 Camden

Region 7 – Toms River  
732 349 0280 Ocean

Region 8 – Trenton  
609 896 3422 Mercer

Region 9 – Wall Twp.  
732 403 8000 Monmouth

Region 11/12 – Edison  
732 287 4700 Middlesex

Region 13 – Flemington Hunterdon/  
908 782 2168 Somerset/Warren

Region 15 – Cranford  
908 709 9440 Union

Region 17 – Parsippany  
973 515 0101 Morris/Sussex

Region 19 – West NY  
201 861 1266 Hudson – North

Region 20 – Jersey City  
201 653 6634 Hudson – South

Region 21 – Livingston  
973 762 6866 Essex

Region 23/25 – Hasbrouck Heights  
201 292 8093 Bergen

Region 27 – Wayne  
973 694 0154 Passaic

Region 29 – Trenton  
609 689 9580 Higher Education

#### Educational materials

##### Guide to Effective Joint Labor/Management Safety and Health Committees

66 pages. Prepared by N.J. PEOSH. The guide is designed for existing committee members as well as those interested in forming a committee. It is organized in eight stages that, if followed, should lead to establishment of an effective committee within six months. Appendices include Employee Hazard Report Form, Health and Safety Program Components, Walkthrough Inspection Worksheet, and Job Hazards Evaluation Form.

Available online at <http://www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/documents/peosh/jlmhsc.pdf>

Any effective effort to make our schools safer and healthier needs to involve NJEA members. Perhaps the best vehicle for member involvement is the health and safety committee which keeps a day-to-day watch over school conditions, identifying and resolving problems before they become serious or result in injuries or illnesses. Committees also provide valuable assistance to association members and school districts.

Experience has shown that it is best for locals to form their own association committee as well as participate in joint labor-management committees at the school and/or district levels. A joint health and safety committee is not a replacement for an association committee, but a complement to it. Indeed, it is only with an association committee that locals can successfully act as watchdogs over the effectiveness of corrective measures taken by district management.

The local association health and safety committee should be a standing committee working closely with local leaders and UniServ representatives. The health and safety committee is the association structure for identifying health and safety issues and facilitating problem solving. Communication with fellow members and with district administration is key to the success of any health and safety committee.

Interested members are crucial to successful committees. Committee members need not be experts in health and safety; interest and concern about the issues are far more important. An understanding of technical and scientific information can be acquired in the course of the committee work. A committee should have about 10 members representing as many job titles and locations as possible, including teachers, special education teachers, paraeducators, custodial/maintenance workers, security staff, secretaries, food service, and bus drivers. School nurses are especially important to recruit both because of their specialized education and awareness of health issues among students and staff.

There are many activities association committees can undertake to identify and prevent hazardous exposures to school personnel. The list below is not exhaustive, but provides a good indication of what the work of the committee can look like.

### **ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

- Inform members about the committee. Post minutes of meetings. Post names and phone numbers of contact people. Report on successes in NJEA newsletters.
- Educate committee members and other members. Distribute NJEA Health and Safety Facts. Discuss with your UniServ representative presenting a health and safety training.

- Develop a hazard reporting form and procedures for members.
- Conduct a survey for documenting work-related health problems of members.
- Set priorities and develop strategy.
- Pick a small “winnable” topic. Start with an issue that is relatively easy to resolve and affects many members. Improving housekeeping often meets this objective.
- Develop contract language for a health and safety committee, including “release time” (paid leave) for committee work.
- Ensure the school district is complying with PEOSH health and safety regulations. Learn how to effectively use PEOSH by contacting your UniServ representative.
- Resolve health and safety grievances; develop expedited health and safety grievance procedure.
- Recommend improvements to the district.
- Follow up on the district’s actions.
- Develop a health and safety library, and files on common hazards and controls.

### **JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES**

After an association committee is well established, it is recommended that the local propose a joint labor-management health and safety committee to district management. Such committees can function either at the school or district level or both. Ideal conditions for labor-management committees include the following points; eventually these should be negotiated into the local contract.

#### **Mission and Powers**

- The committee should not be merely advisory but should have decision-making power and report to someone who implements its decisions.
- The committee should have access to the entire school for inspections and investigations of accidents, near misses, and complaints.

### **Committee Make-Up**

- The association and management should be equally represented.
- The local should choose association members.
- The chair should rotate between the association and management.

### **Committee Meetings**

- The committee should meet regularly (at least once per month). Either party should be able to call an emergency meeting.
- Labor and management should make up the agenda together. The minutes should be approved by both parties and distributed to both management and membership, and include action items and deadlines.
- There should be a neutral procedure for breaking tie votes.

### **Pay for Lost Time**

- As much as possible, all regular committee meetings and walk-around inspections should be conducted during working hours. Safety and health committee members should receive their regular pay for all time spent on committee functions; including regular inspections and meetings, accident and complaint investigations, accompanying PEOSH inspectors during their inspections, and other health and safety activities.

### **Training**

- The contract should provide that each association representative to the joint health and safety committee receive a certain amount of training in occupational health and safety within a prescribed time period. The contract should specify how the training will be selected; by the association with the approval of management, or by joint agreement. It should also spell out how this training will be financed. Management should receive the same training as association representatives.

## **What your association can do:**

- Form a health and safety committee to monitor conditions in the workplace.
- Negotiate health and safety language.
- File grievances regarding unsafe conditions using existing contract language.
- See that training is provided through inservice days.
- Assure that the district complies with the N.J. Public Employee Occupational Safety and Health Act (PEOSH).
- Work with parent and community groups to eliminate and/or prevent hazardous conditions.

## **For Assistance:**

- Contact your association representative immediately. Your local or the NJEA UniServ office can help you with Workers’ Compensation. You are entitled under state law (N.J.S.A.18A:30-2.1) “...to full salary without loss of sick days for up to one year...” and all medical treatment.

# PEOSH Compliance Review

## Activities for Both Types of Committees

### HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM REVIEW

- Review, revise and strengthen district health and safety programs covering indoor air quality; mold prevention and remediation; violence prevention; parking lot safety; ergonomics; safe lifting; preventing slips and falls; minimizing the purchase of chemically-formulated products; purchasing least toxic chemically-formulated products; asbestos, lead, and radon management; bloodborne pathogens; pest control and pesticides use, etc.
- Review compliance with PEOSH standards; including sanitation, record keeping, emergency response and fire prevention, exits, indoor air quality, and bloodborne pathogens.

### Inspections

- The committee should conduct regular walk-around inspections to detect, evaluate and recommend actions to prevent potential health and safety hazards.
- Follow-up inspections should be conducted to guarantee that management has promptly and adequately carried out the committee's recommendations.

### Renovations/New Construction

- The committee should assess potential hazards from proposed school renovations and new construction and recommend corrective measures.

### ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- The committee should have access to all injury and illness records maintained by the employer for PEOSH or workers' compensation purposes. The committee should also have access to:
  - Records of any workplace surveys for safety or health hazards.
  - Records of environmental monitoring by PEOSH or consultants.
  - Lists of all chemicals used or present in the workplace.
  - Past PEOSH and fire department inspection reports and citations.
  - Material Safety Data Sheets on chemically formulated products.
  - Violence and vandalism reports.
  - Costs of different materials and actions under consideration to abate hazards.

### Investigations

- Committee members should investigate any employee complaint of health and safety problems, accidents, or near misses and recommend solutions. The committee should be able to take samples with industrial monitoring equipment and to call in mutually acceptable outside experts to do any additional testing. Members should also participate in any PEOSH or fire department inspections or consultations.

## For more information

### New Jersey Healthy School Facility Environments

<https://www.nj.gov/dep/school>

Access to the online resources of New Jersey state and federal agencies on issues such as indoor air quality, mold, asbestos, lead, and drinking water.

### EPA Healthy Schools, Healthy Kids

<https://www.epa.gov/schools>

EPA Healthy Schools, Healthy Kids is a gateway to online resources to help facility managers, school administrators, architects, design engineers, school nurses, parents, teachers and other staff to address environmental health issues in schools.

### New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)

180 West State Street, PO Box 1211  
Trenton, New Jersey 08607-1211  
609 599 4561

<https://www.njea.org/health-safety-publications/>

### National Education Association (NEA)

1201 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036-3290  
202 833 4000

<https://www.nea.org/healthy-schools>

### PEOSH – NJ Dept. of Health

(Health hazards complaints)

PO Box 360  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360  
609 984 1863

<https://www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/peosh/index.shtml>

### PEOSH – NJ Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development

(Safety hazards and discrimination complaints)

PO Box 386  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0386  
609 633 3896/800 624 1644

<https://www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/peosh/compform.shtml>

### New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC)

(Labor, community, environment coalition)

E-mail: [info@njwec.org](mailto:info@njwec.org)  
[www.njwec.org](http://www.njwec.org)