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# obsidium

### Contact Details:

Phone: 0800 446 829

Fax: 09 915 0549

PO Box 74-434

Market Rd

Auckland 1543

jwarwick@obsidium.com

### Office Hours:

9am - 4.30pm Mon-Fri

### Account Managers:

Jen Andrewartha

Kim Dallmeier

Lian Warwick

### NZ Client Service Desk Manager:

Jodhi Warwick

### Accounts:

Colleen Woods

DDI: (09) 915 2532

Fax: (09) 915 0549

**SafeTsmart**  
an Obsidium Company

## The Health & Safety Zealot

I was recently visiting a busy workplace to provide some onsite SafeTsmart training. After the training session, John, the manager, began to show me the new premises and additional plant. As the tour commenced, his cell phone unexpectedly rang. He quickly motioned for a nearby worker to 'entertain' me while he took the call. "This is Jodhi, show her around the site. She's from Obsidium, they help with our health & safety". Almost immediately his cheerful disposition turned to obvious disappointment. Noticing his lack of enthusiasm I quickly chirped "Yes, and I'm here to personally evaluate your task performance and safety skills!"

I've grown accustomed to this sort of reaction. My quirky comments generally ease most uncomfortable situations, however this continues to draw my attention to an underlying issue in NZ workplaces – unenthusiastic health & safety participants.

I'm excited about and - dare I say - enjoy health & safety management, but I'm still very empathetic to the struggles you each face in trying to get staff to 'buy into' health & safety. One of the easiest ways to increase employee participation is through effective Health & Safety meetings.

## What is a Health & Safety Meeting?

Health and safety meetings are a main component in health & safety management. H&S meetings can be formal or informal and can cover a variety of topics.

*Formal meetings* are planned. Employees may be provided with an agenda, previous meeting minutes, safety statistics, training issues, changes to legislation / standards / regulations, new procedures, and/or new

hazard identifications - each item is not necessarily required for each meeting.

*Informal meetings*, are often called Tool Box and Tailgate meetings, they too can be planned. These meetings are often 10-15minutes long.

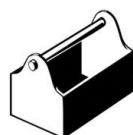
Tool box and Tailgate meetings are very effective at relating employees' health & safety to specific projects or tasks.

*Tool box meetings* are generally held prior to commencing a project. They identify tasks, highlight hazards and controls, and re-

iterate health & safety practices.

*Tailgate Meetings* are held at the end of a project. These meetings often evaluate projects results, review performance, identify improvements, and/or find solutions to problems that arose.

Ongoing H&S meetings may also be held throughout each project.



FYI: Tool Box and Tailgate meetings do not have to be held next to a Tool Box or a Tailgate.





## Why are health & safety meetings important?

All employers are required under the HSE Act to provide reasonable opportunities for their employees to participate effectively in processes for improving health and safety at work; and some employers, (depending on size of workplace or on whether there is direct employee interest) in co-operation with employees and any unions representing them, are required to develop a system for employee participation. Health & Safety Meetings help to meet some of these obligations.

Maureen Alvarez also offered some additional explanations:

**Safety meetings are important to the success of your safety program because they impact all of the following:**

*Safety meetings encourage safety awareness.* Other means of getting the safety message across are often too easily ignored. But, when a group of workers get together to discuss the hazards they have encountered and the steps they can take to eliminate them, it increases each worker's safety consciousness.

*Safety meetings get employees actively involved.* In a sense, safety meetings put employees "on the spot"; that is, they demand feedback. They get employees thinking about safety and encourage them to come up with ideas and suggestions for preventing accidents and minimizing the hazards with which they are most familiar.

*Safety meetings motivate employees to follow proper safety practices.* Small group meetings are the best place to demonstrate the uses of protective equipment, proper lifting techniques and other safety procedures.

*Safety meetings can help to nip safety hazards in the bud.* A safety meeting is the time to pinpoint minor hazards before they result in real problems. It also presents a good opportunity to discuss hazards that are inherent in the environment and that experienced employees are likely to take for granted.

*Safety meetings introduce workers to new safety rules, equipment and preventive practices.* In addition to introducing new things, a safety meeting is a good time to reinforce the importance of long-standing safety procedures and to remind employees of the reasons behind them.

*Safety meetings provide vital information on accident causes and types.* Regular meetings are the best way of keeping employees up-to-date on the hazards in their environment and what can be done about them. They also make it easier for the company to maintain accurate accident statistics, an important tool in tracing the progress of prevention efforts.

"The Anatomy of a Safety Meeting" By Maureen Alvarez, CIH, CSP

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*"..Regular meetings are the best way of keeping employees up-to-date on the hazards in their environment and what can be done about them. ..."*



## How do I start having health & safety meetings ?

- Seek support from management
- Assign someone to act as the facilitator, preferably a supervisor or manager.
- Choose a regular time to hold the meetings i.e. every Friday morning at 9am.
- Use an agenda and keep minutes. Agendas ensure the meeting flows and stays on track. Minutes ensure staff who are not present have access to what was discussed and also show what issues were discussed and actions were implemented.
- Your agenda can include: Opening remarks, Apologies, Minutes of the previous meeting, Matters arising from these minutes and Correspondence. The main items of business follow. This would include reports, new matters needing discussion or other general business, New Hazards identified, Next Training Due, Health & Safety Topics, Date of next meeting...
- Invite all staff
- Encourage participation by giving staff small tasks. i.e. Assign an employee to read last week's meeting minutes, give a 2minute Health & Safety topic, record the minutes, or to 'round everyone up' for the meeting...
- Challenge and reward your staff. In our office we have 'snickers challenges' where the staff have one week to answer some health and safety questions. They can be as simple as listing what training they have, when it was received and when it expires. Answers may be written or given verbally. Almost all staff will participate just to receive a chocolate reward!
- Keep your meeting concise.

## What should I record in my meeting minutes?

Minutes are a written record of a meeting. They often give an overview of the structure of the meeting, starting with a list of those present. Minutes communicate concerns or actions to employees, a statement of the various issues before the participants, and each of their responses including any assignments.

### HINTS:

Type up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting, while everything is still fresh in your mind.

Include the name of organization, name of committee, type of meeting (daily, weekly, monthly, annual, or special), purpose of meeting, and all Attendees

Include the date and time the meeting began and ended.

Record the discussion and also any assignments that were given including the due dates.

Proof read the minutes.



## What should I do with minutes?

Most workplaces do not effectively use their H&S meeting minutes. The following are suggestions for what to do with your minutes.

*File them with your H&S Management system.*

*Place a copy of your meeting minutes on your bulletin board. You may even ask staff to sign and date that they have read and reviewed it, particularly those who were not present.*

*If you have illiterate or 'English as a Second language' staff that were away, then ensure that the*

*minutes are read or translated for them. Ask questions to ensure the staff member understands. (Be mindful of your staff. This may need to be done separately to avoid embarrassment).*

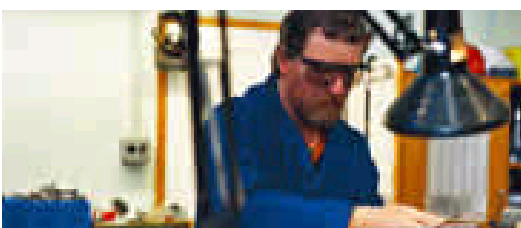
*Any corrective actions that arise from the meeting should also be signed off once implemented. If you are an Obsidium service desk client your account manager can be sent the minutes and all reminders will show on your next Outstanding Actions report.*

Health & Safety meetings

are not meant to be hard or overly complicated. It should be a systematic approach to the management of your health and safety systems. Meetings and their associated records are the simplest and easiest way to begin your H&S system. The flow on affect of H&S meetings are employee participation, increased job satisfaction, record keeping, implementation of corrective actions, hazard identification and controls - it couldn't be simpler - so get to it!

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*"Health & Safety meetings are not meant to be hard or overly complicated.."*



If you would like more information, please email your account manager who will assist you further, alternatively Information on the HSE Act 1992 can be found at [www.dol.govt.nz](http://www.dol.govt.nz)