

# Union Participation in a SOHMS

An effective safety and occupational health management system (SOHMS) establishes a partnership between management and labor. If your organization has civilian employees represented by one or more collective bargaining units (i.e., unions), then bargaining units officials (known as employee representatives) should support and be actively involved in the SOHMS. This one pager provides some suggestions on engaging your employee representatives.



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## CULTIVATE UNION SUPPORT

Leadership cannot improve an organization's safety and health (S&H) program or safety culture alone. Inviting employee representatives to participate in the SOHMS, such as being a member of the safety committee, offers them a stake in developing, implementing, and sustaining S&H programs and policies. Regularly communicate and provide meeting minutes for employee representatives that are unable to attend committee meetings. Ask employee representatives to attend safety-related functions and meetings and voice their opinions and concerns. Request their advice and support for S&H decisions affecting the organization. Encourage employee representatives' participation during employee awards and recognition ceremonies. These roles and active involvement showcase the benefits of the SOHMS, motivates employee representatives to garner bargaining unit support, and helps the organization effectively implement S&H actions.



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If your organization is pursuing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) Star approval, bargaining unit support in writing is required. Each collective bargaining unit must provide a statement of support for the SOHMS or sign the organization's application for Star approval. See the SMCX One Pager, "*Developing an OSHA VPP Union Commitment Letter*", for guidance on statements of support, available on the Links and Resources page of the SMCX website (<https://www.smcx.org/Links>).

If pursuing another SOHMS model other than OSHA VPP, your organization should consider having a signed statement of support from local bargaining units as a best practice to demonstrate the bargaining unit leadership's commitment towards bettering workplace S&H.

## DEVELOP WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Creating and maintaining strong working relationships takes sincere commitment by leadership, management, and employee representatives. This group's focus is making the workplace safer. It is up to leadership and the employee representatives to work together and address any employee S&H concerns and seek agreeable resolutions. This table summarizes how working relationships contribute to SOHMS success.

LEADERSHIP	MANAGEMENT	EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES
Empower and motivate the team	Actively participate in S&H programs (e.g., workplace inspections, training)	Show support for the SOHMS
Respect individual opinions and recognize good S&H behaviors	Empower employees to report and fix S&H hazards	Actively participate on safety committees or working groups
Provide S&H resources for the team (e.g., budget, personnel, training)	Communicate S&H program information (e.g., goals, policies, and inspection results)	Serve as a conduit for communicating SOHMS information to bargaining unit members
Establish and track specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound goals	Encourage employees to participate in meaningful S&H activities (e.g., conducting hazard analyses, performing self-inspections)	
Communicate goals and progress across the organization	Recognize employees for S&H successes	Serve as an SOHMS advocate during mentor or assessment team visits
Trust the process!		

## UNION WITHDRAWAL OF SOHMS SUPPORT

The collective bargaining unit has the right to withdraw its support for a SOHMS at any time. This withdrawal might occur if the unit perceives lack of management support or commitment toward S&H at an organization. Bargaining units should only consider withdrawing support from an SOHMS when employee S&H is involved, not as a bargaining chip for other union initiatives. Without full bargaining unit support, an organization seeking OSHA VPP Star approval or re-approval would no longer qualify and would need to withdraw from the program. This withdrawal does not exempt bargaining unit employees from complying with the requirements of the organization's S&H program.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.