

Actions to Take When There is a Lack of Union Support for My Safety and Occupational Health Management System

Does your organization struggle with gaining union support for your safety occupational health management system (SOHMS)? The lack of a strong partnership between management and union representatives not only negatively affects your SOHMS, but also safety and health (S&H) programs, your organization's S&H culture, the ability to achieve S&H goals, and your overall mission.

If your organization experiences a lack of union support, stop and ask WHY? This one pager discusses ways to gain union support and help your organization establish a better, more cooperative, and more involved SOHMS.

ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

A lack of communication results in distrust, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings in your management-labor relations. Email communications alone are not enough! If you have SOHMS-related issues with your union partners, arrange a face-to-face meeting between management and union representatives to foster open discussion. Use this meeting as your starting point to identify issues and resolve them, if possible. Set aside equal time for both management and union personnel to express their concerns and viewpoints, ask questions, and provide feedback. Create a list of issues identified during the meeting to review together and develop solutions.

SEEK UNION INVOLVEMENT

Not including the union in meetings, communications, activities, and S&H-related decisions can strain the management-labor relationship. Work with your Labor Relations representatives and review [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) language regarding S&H. Treat the union like a true and equal partner by inviting representatives to S&H-related meetings and activities. Having union participation gives you the opportunity to: present and discuss particular S&H issues; gain input and perspectives the effects of SOHMS changes on employee S&H; and receive feedback regarding decisions with potential to affect workplace S&H. Use teamwork to devise strategies for continuous improvement.

When you need to communicate important or urgent S&H information, consider messaging (or a joint message) coming from both top leaders and the union. Doing so shows both parties support and back the S&H announcement. Additionally, as a courtesy, consider copying union representatives on other SOHMS emails and communications to keep them in the loop. These actions go a long way in developing a strong partnership.



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WHY do you have a lack of union support for your SOHMS?

Common Issues

- Poor communication
- Misunderstanding or misinterpreting what a SOHMS is
- Personality conflicts
- Union not feeling like a true and equal partner
- Differences in priorities
- Use of S&H as a bargaining chip
- Procrastination on key topics from the organization

BE PROACTIVE AND SHARE SOHMS INFORMATION

Anticipate your union's interests and concerns by proactively sharing SOHMS and other S&H information directly with the union, rather than having them ask for it. Provide periodic updates on S&H initiatives, goal progression, reported S&H issues, and plans to improve S&H. Communicate to the union how they can help contribute to and improve the SOHMS, too. Updating them on key information helps show how management believes the union is a need-to-know partner regarding the SOHMS.

Consult with your unions or other labor relations when preparing to select a SOHMS for implementation. Schedule a meeting to discuss the SOHMS options, educate union representatives on management's choice, as well as why the choice is believed to be best. Consider asking other organizations' labor representatives speak to your unions about successfully implementing the SOHMS and the benefits both the organization and their employees experienced. Always provide the union time to voice opinions and ask questions to better understand their roles, the goals of the SOHMS, and the organization's goals going forward.

TAKE UNION FEEDBACK SERIOUSLY

Listening to the union's concerns, inputs, and suggestions is important, but taking action shows the union is a valued partner in the SOHMS. This step is essential in maintaining a good relationship!

Think about the suggestions your union has provided on S&H improvements or changes – did you address or implement any of them? Did you provide direct feedback to the union on how you are moving forward with their suggestion, or why it is not being considered?



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You do not have to use every recommendation submitted; however, consistently ignoring or disregarding suggestions makes anyone (the union or your employees) feel undervalued and like they wasted their time. It is especially important if the union conveys the change is necessary for employee S&H. Take all suggestions seriously and provide feedback on the status of each suggestion. Be ready to provide a reason as to why action will not be taken on a given suggestion.

USE A MUTUALLY AGREED UPON NEUTRAL THIRD PARTY, IF NECESSARY

On rare occasions, communications may reach an impasse, productive discussions are no longer possible, or working together to plan for and resolve S&H and SOHMS-related issues and concerns becomes one-sided. Work with management and seek guidance from the Office of Personnel Management, or a mutually agreed upon third party, to facilitate meetings and discussions. The role of this neutral third party is to help both sides consider all issues and come up with solutions. If this remediation fails, formal arbitration may become necessary.

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