
How to Establish & Operate a Safety Program

From the American Water Works Association (www.awwa.org)

According to the National Safety Council, accident rates in the 1990s continue to be high for the drinking water community, even when compared with other high-risk fields such as construction and mining (Table 1). These statistics illustrate the need to establish serious section safety programs.

Table 1. Lost Workday Cases

	Number of Cases (per 100 workers per year)
Water supply	6.2
Electrical Services	2.1
Gas distribution	3.5
Construction	3.4
Mining	1.6

AWWA sections can help their utilities reduce this high rate of accidents by taking a strong leadership role. This brochure is a guide to help your section establish and operate a successful safety program.

Establish a Section Safety Committee

The safety committee should be a standing committee of your section. If your section does not have a committee, you will need to establish one. The safety committee has two main functions: helping section utilities with accident prevention and helping AWWA headquarters collect accident statistics and present safety awards.

The committee should establish goals and objectives. Some examples are reducing the accident rate in your section by a certain percentage and reducing the severity of accidents, or specifying a certain number of safety seminars are held each year.

For help in establishing the committee, you should review the AWWA Safety Committee Handbook, which is sent to all new safety committee chairs. This document has many tips and suggestions. Also, check with AWWA sections and other types of industries to find out about their safety programs. Review your goal annually to keep your program current. Be sure to develop safety programs that meet the needs of the utilities in your section. Be creative, innovative and bold.

The Five-Point Program

To help get a new or inactive program rolling, begin with this five-step program. Sections completing all five steps are eligible for AWWA's Safety Honor Roll.

1. Establish a budget for safety and health training.
2. Conduct one full-day safety-training seminar annually.
3. Include one safety article in each edition of the section newsletter.
4. Present one safety topic at the annual section meeting.
5. Promote the AWWA safety poster calendar contest.

Resources

- AWWA Technical and Education Department, (303) 794-7711
- AWWA "How-to" Guide for Sections: Committee Management. Available online and from AWWA Members and Section Services Department, (303) 347-6202.

Help Utilities Improve Safety Performances

Accidents have a major impact on water utilities. Not only are accidents costly in economic terms, but human pain, suffering, and lower morale are also consequences.

Too often we see only the direct costs of accidents, such as the medical bills. But the indirect costs can be as much as 50 times greater. These indirect costs include lost time and productivity, legal settlements, increased insurance and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) fines.

The committee should help utilities improve safety performance with information and education. Target utilities with safety records below the national average. Determine the nature of the accidents and target programs at these weak points. Safety is not a once-a-year issue. To keep safety foremost in the minds of utility managers and workers, help them become "safety smart" - by planning a comprehensive safety program.

The safety program should include a variety of the following activities:

Write a Safety Newsletter or Column

If your section has a newsletter, you can write a regular column on safety. If your section doesn't have newsletter, consider starting one for safety issues. Some of the topics could be

- A calendar of safety-related activities such as AWWA safety seminars, conferences, and workshops and the start-up dates of new OSHA laws.
- Seasonal safety issues such as winter-driving, vacation and holiday safety, and National Fire Prevention Week.
- New regulations from OSHA, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the states in your section.
- Section safety contests.

Resource

- AWWA Safety Talks (See AWWA Publications Catalog)

Review AWWA Safety Program Materials

AWWA has several safety programs and publications that are available to section safety committees as well as to the drinking water community. Your safety committee should review these programs and pass the information along to the section's utilities. The topics include

- Back injury prevention
- Chlorine and other chemical safety x Confined-space safety
- Hazard communication
- Respirator safety
- Excavation safety

Resources

- Opflow, Mainstream
- AWWA Publications Catalog

Conduct Inspections, Audits, and Performance Evaluations

Section safety committees can provide a valuable service to their member utilities by providing safety evaluations or audits. AWWA offers a course called Water Utility Safety Manager that will train an individual to perform these audits. Contact AWWA Technical and Education Department for more information.

Hold Training and Safety Events

Conduct a regular schedule of training and safety events. Be sure to hold events at different locations within the section to make it easier for members to attend. You can use AWWA training packages or develop your own. Topics covered in these packages include

- Personal protective equipment
- Industrial hygiene
- Trench safety
- Work area protection
- Chlorine container hookup procedures
- Promotional events such as poster contests

Give Safety Talks and Write Articles for AWWA Publications

Encourage section members to write and give safety talks at the section level or the annual AWWA conference. The talks could also be turned into articles for AWWA publications such as *Opflow* or *MainStream*. Submit copy directly to the editors or to the AWWA Technical and Education Department.

Help AWWA Headquarters Compile Accident Statistics

AWWA headquarters collects, tabulates, and reports accident statistics to measure safety performance. Data are collected at the national and section levels. The section safety committee should help by following these steps:

1. Review the mailing list. Each January, AWWA sends the section chair a list of water utilities within the section that have been sent AWWA accident report forms. Review this list to make sure all the utilities in your section (including those that aren't AWWA members) have been included. State health departments in your section can provide a list of water utilities. The safety chair should notify AWWA of any utilities not on the list so they can be added.
2. Become familiar with the accident reporting procedures. Your safety committee should be familiar with the accident reporting procedures, in case utilities need help completing the AWWA accident report forms. The statistics must be accurate.

Resource

- AWWA Manual M3 - Safety Practices for Water Utilities, Chapter 11, Safety Records, Statistics, and Reports

Present Section Safety Awards

The accident statistics are the basis for annual AWWA safety awards at the national level and section levels. Utilities that have performed well are recognized to encourage others to strive for similar or better performances. The section safety awards are based solely on accident statistics. These awards are sent from AWWA Headquarters to the safety committee chair for presentation. The steps listed below should be followed for presentation of section awards:

1. Refer to a list of your section's award recipients. AWWA headquarters compiles a list of the utilities that have qualified for a section award. Each section's safety committee chair will get this list.
2. Print the award certificate. Blank certificates are sent to the chair. Fill in the certificates with the utility name, total hours worked, date, and signatures.
3. Present the certificates. The awards should be presented during the annual section meeting.

Resource

- AWWA Manual M3 - Safety Practices for Water Utilities, Appendix A, Safety Awards

Nominate Utilities for National Safety Awards

The AWWA national awards for outstanding accomplishment in safety are based on overall safety program excellence. The four national awards are presented to utilities in the following categories:

- Class I (less than 10 employees)
- Class II (10 to 100 employees)
- Class III (101 to 500 employees)
- Class IV (over 500 employees)

If there are any outstanding candidates, the section may nominate one utility in each category. The procedure for nomination follows:

1. Make a list of the utilities in each category. The utilities in your section should be listed according to category.
2. Determine those utilities with outstanding safety records. Based on the accident rates compiled by AWWA, judge which utilities in each category have outstanding records.
3. Collect additional information about the utilities' safety programs. To help with the nomination, the committee should find out more information about the outstanding utilities' safety programs. For example, a utility may require a weekly safety training session for employees, have an incentive program for accident-free days, or use a suggestion box for safety ideas. AWWA has developed a data sheet for you to use. A blank form is included in AWWA Manual M3 - Safety Practices for Water Utilities. Send a copy to those utilities with outstanding records. Be sure to give them a return deadline.
4. Nominate section candidates. The safety committee nominates one utility in each category based on the accident statistics compiled by AWWA headquarters and the additional information submitted by the utilities.
5. Send the nominations and any pertinent information to AWWA headquarters. After the candidates have been selected, forward all the information you have gathered to:

Volunteer & Technical Support
AWWA
6666 W. Quincy Avenue
Denver, CO 80235
Deadline: June 30