

Today's Veterinary **Business**

BUSINESS PROTECT & DEFEND



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5 keys to a successful safety meeting

For starters, begin early in the day, take attendance, keep everything short, and make the presentation entertaining and visual.

In my article “Calculated Risks” [April/May 2022], I discussed many of the internal and external threats inherent in the delivery of veterinary services and the need for a solid risk-management plan. A critical but often overlooked component of such a program is routine safety meetings. Not only are they essential for your employees’ well-being, but they also are required by law. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration mandates that all businesses, no matter their size, hold safety meetings. A company with 10 or fewer employees may engage a committee, while larger ones must have team meetings. The sessions must be scheduled regularly to comply with OSHA regulations.

Regardless of the timing, safety meetings serve as a reminder to employees to be mindful of their activities and follow the measures that are a part of your organization’s safety policy.

I encourage practice administrators to view the meetings as an opportunity to review specific risks and safety protocols. The meetings also allow team mem-

bers to discuss safety concerns and solutions.

Unfortunately, many veterinary practices are not in compliance with the gatherings. One reason is that few things create less excitement within a clinic than a team meeting, particularly when the title includes the word “safety.” The sessions are almost universally perceived as tedious, unproductive and, to experienced team members, unnecessary interruptions in an otherwise busy workday. However, that doesn’t need to be the case. Proper planning can make the meetings short and informative and enhance a practice’s safety culture.

What makes for a good safety meeting? These five components.





1 Consistency

Attendance should be mandatory for all team members and a part of everyone's job description and annual performance review. In addition, the meetings should be held on the same day and at the same time each month, if possible, to afford everyone the ability to schedule accordingly.

What is the best time for a safety meeting? Put yourself in your team members' shoes. Many practices hold the meetings during the lunch hour. Though it's convenient from a workflow standpoint, consider the downside of a lunchtime slot:

- It eliminates a true midday downtime, creating the feeling of a very long day at work. The "working lunch" concept is historically embraced by management but not the team.
- Assembled team members tend to focus more on the job tasks that await them than the topics discussed.

Therefore, meeting experts recommend getting everyone together at the start of the workday. People are fresh and yet to be encumbered by the multitude of activities undertaken in a busy veterinary practice.

Also of note:

- Midweek meetings typically work best.
- Reconfirm the meeting date and time through whatever communication method is best for your team. Be consistent in the message's delivery, timing and format.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many insurance brokers can provide training resources that address the most critical safety risks associated with a veterinary practice.

2 Timing

Remember this:

- Meetings should be short and to the point.
- Limit them to 10 to 20 minutes. Longer meetings lead to a loss of attention and the retention of salient details.

3 Preparation

Make sure to set an agenda and distribute it in advance. Note the meeting topics and objectives. For example, "During this month's safety meeting, we will review animal-handling and restraint protocols and how to properly select and use each type of chemical and physical restraint we utilize in the practice."

Other advice:

- Limit the agenda to a topic or two.
- The topics should be relevant to either identified safety concerns, such as recent employee injuries, the implementation of new safety equipment or protocols, OSHA-required training, and the handling of hazardous materials.
- If the meeting leader appears unfocused and ill-prepared, attendees will assume the assembly isn't important and won't take it seriously.
- Set up any visuals, props or demonstrations ahead of time.

4 Management

Here's one key recommendation: Start and end the meeting on time, or better yet, end early. Attendees will appreciate the acknowledgment that they are busy and their time is valuable.

Four other suggestions:

- Take roll. Have each team member sign in, and file the document with your OSHA compliance material.
- Stay on task. Don't allow the discussion to deviate to extraneous topics. Also, quickly gain the team's agreement to put any relevant new issues on the next agenda.
- People don't want lectures, so engage the team and make the meetings entertaining and visual. Integrate photos, charts, videos or hands-on demonstrations into the presentation to best hold the team's attention. The more senses you engage, the more likely the message will be retained.
- Allow time for questions and answers. The meeting leader should not answer all the questions. Instead, let one or more other veteran team members respond or talk about their experiences.

5 Follow-Up

After the meeting, ask for any additional questions and general feedback. Be open to suggestions for improving the meeting to support better engagement. In addition, follow up with a handout, email or safety poster to reinforce the critical points of your discussion and any action steps.