HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDE

Being a survey champion for psychological health and safety



A psychosocial hazard survey is only as useful as the participation behind it. Survey champions are the members who make that participation possible. This guide explains what the role is, what it's not and how to do it well.

What is a survey champion?

A survey champion is a union member who has been designated by the local or the health and safety committee to promote a psychosocial hazard survey, answer questions about it and help colleagues feel comfortable participating. Champions are a trusted, peer-level source of information. They are not investigators, analysts or counsellors.

Why champions matter

Union members are more likely to complete a survey when someone they know and trust explains what it is for. Personal outreach builds confidence in confidentiality in a way that mass emails can't and keeps momentum going through the survey period without flooding members with reminders. Champions also reach people who might otherwise be missed, including members on different shifts, in different locations or with limited access to email.

Who makes a good champion

A good champion is trusted and respected by colleagues, can keep information shared in confidence private and is comfortable having conversations about workplace stress without trying to solve individual problems. Champions should represent the range of the workplace, including departments, shifts, job classifications and worksites. They should be willing to take a brief orientation and to ask for help.

The committee or local should designate enough champions to reach the membership personally, relative to the size and spread of the workplace. Aim for coverage across shifts and worksites rather than a fixed number.

What champions do

Before the survey: Champions learn the purpose of the survey, what hazards it's investigating and how the results will be used. If asked, they take part in the pilot test and pass along feedback from colleagues about unclear or missing questions. They should know the answers to the most common member questions and who to refer other questions to.

During the survey: Champions let members know the survey is open, why it matters and how long it takes. They explain how to access it, help with technical or scheduling barriers as they come up and check in personally with colleagues rather than relying on repeated group reminders. They should look for barriers, such as technical problems or shift conflicts, and flag them to the committee so they can be fixed.

After the survey: Champions help share results and the committee's planned actions with members, gather member thoughts and bring them back to the committee. Seeing that action is being taken is the best way to encourage participation in follow-up surveys.

What champions don't do

Champions don't pressure anyone to participate, since participation is the member's choice. They don't ask members what they answered or try to work out who said what. They don't interpret or analyze results on their own, and they don't provide counselling or advice on individual mental health. Members who are struggling should be referred to their local, the employee assistance program where available or other appropriate supports. Champions also don't speak for the employer or the committee beyond what they have been given to share.

Working time and employer support

When the employer has agreed to the survey, champions can make it clear that completing it is part of regular work duties, and champion activities should be agreed upon with the employer so they can be done during work hours. When the employer has not agreed, members should complete the survey away from work and on their own time. Champion activities will also likely need to be done during off time, so plan outreach for breaks taken off the worksite, union meetings or after hours. Check your collective agreement and applicable legislation if you are unsure.

Common member questions

Why are we doing this? To gather evidence about psychological health and safety conditions so the committee can identify hazards and advocate for changes. This is a hazard identification and assessment, which is a core function of health and safety committees.

Is it confidential? Be accurate and direct about how the survey tool handles responses, who sees the data, and the minimum group sizes for reporting. If CUPE is running the survey, the data will be held on secure servers and only non-identifying aggregate data will be provided to the employer. If your workplace is using a different process, find out the answer to this question before promoting the survey.

Will anything happen with the results? Explain what the committee plans to do with the findings and the timelines for sharing results and next steps. Don't promise outcomes you can't guarantee.

Is this about my own mental health? The survey looks at workplace conditions, such as workload, control over work, support and recognition, not at whether individual members are well or unwell. The focus is on work hazards, not on fixing individuals.

Do I have to complete it on my own time? Answer according to whether the employer has agreed to the survey.

Tips for good outreach

Talk to people, because a short, personal conversation beats a stack of reminders. Be honest about what the survey can and can't do. Tailor your message to the person, since shift workers, remote members and newer members may need different approaches. Follow up once, then respect a member's decision not to participate.

Reaching every member

Members don't all work the same hours, speak the same language or have the same access to the survey. If outreach only reaches those who are easiest to reach, the results will describe only part of the workplace. When considering your champions, think about who might be missed: members on nights or rotating shifts, part-time and casual members, those at remote or small worksites, members who speak other languages or have reduced literacy, members with disabilities, members with limited technology access and members from equity-deserving groups who may have reason to doubt their input is safe.

Supporting champions

The local and committee should give champions what they need to do the job well: a clear description of the role, a short briefing on the survey and its confidentiality, a contact person for questions and time to do the work where the employer has agreed. Champions should also be recognized for the work they do.

When to seek additional support

CUPE health and safety specialists can assist locals and committees with survey planning, legal and policy questions and supports members may need. Champions should refer to the committee or local any case where a member reports a serious mental health impact requiring immediate attention. Remember that your role is to help colleagues take part and to bring their experience back to the committee. You are not expected to solve every problem alone.

Quick checklist for champions

- ☐ I understand the purpose of the survey and how results will be used.
- ☐ I know how to access the survey and who to contact with questions.
- ☐ I can explain confidentiality accurately.
- ☐ I know whether the employer has agreed, and what that means for working time.
- ☐ I have a plan to reach colleagues on every shift and at every worksite.
- ☐ I know where to refer a member who needs support.
- ☐ I know when and how results will be shared back with members.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

CUPE Health and Safety Branch 1375 St. Laurent Boulevard, OTTAWA, ON K1G 0Z7
Tel: (844) 237-1590 (toll free) Email: **health_safety@cupe.ca**