

Management hijacked the safety captain program



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During the last few months, there have been a few items brought to our attention indicating that management has elected to pave its own safety path without the NALC's involvement.

A few months back, I was contacted by a branch officer from the Western Area on the subject of a new safety program that management rolled out with neither any input nor advance notice to the local union. I asked the officer to provide me with any and all information that they could to see what management was up to. I received a second inquiry from a branch officer in the same area indicating that management had made a

drastic change in the safety captain program. Separately, I received an inquiry from yet another branch officer in another area indicating that management is soliciting safety captains and ignoring the NALC's role in appointing them. A review of the solicitation included the following items which are of concern.

Concern 1: Be an example of a safe and *productive* employee.

Response: Why is management requiring that safety captains be examples of productivity? The heat-related fatalities and injuries that we have recently suffered are examples of why DOIS numbers (productivity) should be thrown out the window so that we can focus on prevention of injuries and fatalities. If safety is, in fact, a core principle, it should not be tied to productivity. It should breathe on its own in spite of productivity.

Concern 2: Assist supervisor in maintaining a safe operation.

Response: The union has been involved in this mission since our early national agreements. Why is the employer now seeking to circumvent the union's role in this important matter?

Concern 3: Assist supervisor and safety personnel in conducting facility safety inspections.

Response: 824.322 of the *ELM* and the *Handbook EL-809* specify that the duties and responsibilities of the local safety committee include participation in the inspection of the facilities. 824.41 of the *ELM* indicates that the employer may consult with a reasonable number of employees during inspections: "...[I]f there are no authorized representatives of employees..." Is the employer attempting to circumvent the union's involvement in such an inspection?

Concern 4: Participate in accident review boards and in safety committee meetings.

Response to review board: Chapter 8 of the *ELM*, at 822.221, identifies the mandatory composition of the board (four management designees), as well as one optional union designee from the safety committee. This contract language clearly does not allow the employer to undermine the union's role in selecting this designee.

Response to safety committee meeting participation: The Handbook EL-809 identifies the mandatory composition of the local safety committee and does not include a safety captain; however, if the union appoints the safety captain and also appoints this person to the safety committee, then this is permissible, as it recognizes the union authority and its role in safety.

As I discussed the issue with union officers, it sounded like the safety captain program was hijacked by management for its purposes. The program as developed was straight out of USPS Headquarters without any advance notice to your safety designee here at NALC Headquarters.

On Aug. 1, just as we were finalizing our training materials for the national convention held in Los Angeles, I received a notification of a new "Lean Safety" concept that had been developed at USPS Headquarters. The notice advised that it was going to be deployed beginning in August. Too late. That car was hijacked long ago. We will be meeting with management to address the program and our concerns and will keep you posted on further developments.

Convention workshops

I want to thank those of you who attended our suicide prevention workshop on Tuesday morning, the critical incident response workshop held on Tuesday afternoon, the safety workshop held on Wednesday morning, and the dignity and respect workshop held on Thursday morning. The opportunity to share what we have learned, and then watch you put that information to use, is one of the greatest honors that comes with serving you. I thank you for your attention and dedication to our union's efforts.

I also wish to thank Dave Miller of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458, Arturo Ramirez of Houston Branch 283 and Dan Tegreeny of Central Florida Branch 1091 for their willingness to participate in the workshop and share the experience they gained from their local critical incidents. I also wish to thank Richard Thurman of St. Louis Branch 343, Mike Caref of Chicago Branch 11 and Frank Maresca of Northeastern New York Branch 358, who joined me as presenters in our safety briefing as well as the dignity and respect class.