

How genuine is management's latest safety commitment?



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In my October column, I addressed our concerns involving unilateral changes implemented by management relating to the safety captain program. This new “Lean Safety” program was developed by management (operations) without any bargaining or notification to NALC before its rollout.

The notification that we received contains a printout of the PowerPoint slides. On review, the description suggests a renewed interest in safety and encourages local management to get on board. One of the slides, titled “What we owe our employees,” describes the need to show a “genuine” commitment to safety.

There is much emphasis placed on learning how to observe and correct hazards before an employee suffers an injury. This is an important core component of a successful safety program. The daily process is intended to begin with Hazard Identification and Work Observation, through a “Gemba Walk,” which should lead to Lean Safety huddles, in which you are advised of the results of the observations. The slides explain that the intent is to hold a “meaningful safety discussion” with you. How meaningful have the discussions been at your safety huddles?

We know that, prior to this new safety concept, management did not regularly comply with the rule that we are required to have a five-minute safety talk every week. The safety huddles help to comply with that rule, but we are far from achieving the “genuine” interest in many of our work locations.

Feedback that I am getting from employees and union leadership is that many managers are going through the motions, but have not genuinely embraced safety. We are told that it only appears that we are having a meaningful discussion on safety, but we are not. Management puts checkmarks in the boxes, grades their compliance, and then rushes you back to your tasks as quickly as can be achieved. The reality is that they are demonstrating only a measured commitment to safety and only if it does not affect the cost of operations.

I invite you to contact me about your Lean Safety experiences.

Update on OSHA citations

This year, we received notice relating to a number of OSHA citations issued to the USPS for its failure to protect you from the hazards of extreme heat.

In one of the citations, OSHA determined that an employee had been exposed to a heat index of 105-plus degrees and began experiencing cramps followed by vomiting. He tried to call his supervisors and had to make three attempts before he got through to inform his supervisor of the problem. He soon received a call from another supervisor, who was only interested in finding how much mail he had left and how much assistance was needed to get the route delivered. The citation indicates that a total of 35 minutes went by between the employee's first effort to call management and the decision by management to call 911 for assistance. That 35-minute delay could have cost him his life.

In another OSHA citation, USPS was admonished because the Post Office did not develop a heat-safety program nor train its supervisors adequately to prevent tragedies. OSHA recommended that the supervisors and all employees should be trained annually in advance of the hot-weather season. Put this on your agenda for safety committee meetings in the spring so that everyone is trained before a heat-related incident occurs.

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In another OSHA citation, it was recommended that the USPS establish an acclimatization program, that we start our routes earlier to minimize exposure to the heat, and to assign a supervisor or other personnel to closely monitor employees for adequate hydration and work-rest cycles.

Don't wait for a manager to decide if you should call 911. If your well-being is in danger, you don't need a manager's permission—make the call immediately. Our experience in the above example is not isolated. Delaying medical attention can only worsen your medical condition. This applies to extreme heat as well as the extreme cold that some of us are experiencing right now.

Be careful and keep an eye on each other.