

The blame game



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As the heat of the summer draws close to an end, I have had an opportunity to review a number of heat safety reports, prepared by the affected carriers and/or their union stewards and officers. Many of these reports show me that management's attitude toward safety is far from where it should be.

The present safety culture discourages many employees from reporting hazards due to the push-back attitude of their supervisors/managers, who are more interested in how much time such a report will cost them instead of embracing the opportunity to avoid costs associated with the injury if the hazard is not corrected. If your supervisor truly

cares about your safe work environment, we would not have to fight them to get our vehicles serviced (preventative maintenance) or hazards corrected without having to file grievances.

Some managers at USPS Headquarters get offended when I question the level of sincere concern for the safety and health of our letter carriers. As I wrote last month, you are frequently thrown under the bus the moment that you have an accident, regardless of the circumstances.

Today, I am reviewing information received from a union officer on the subject of a letter of warning issued to a carrier because he was stung by a bee. The carrier had been asked a series of questions during the investigative process, which made it clear to me that the employer was not interested in finding out what happened and why, but rather in how to blame our carrier. That manager thinks that he has done what he is supposed to do, but he has done exactly the opposite. Instead of encouraging the reporting of accidents, he has discouraged the recipient of the letter of warning as well as all other carriers in that delivery unit.

The letter of warning states that, "...[Y]ou have been instructed to work in a safe manner at all times. Contrary to these instructions...you stepped off the porch and were stung by a bee..." Seriously?

Management cited five sections from two handbooks, suggesting that our carrier was not conscientious in the safe performance of his duties and that his injury suggested disobedience and defiance.

In my November 2011 and my May 2013 *Postal Record* columns, I made reference to Section 821.131 and Section 821.3 of the *ELM* and the purpose of the investigation of an accident, emphasizing that when we do what we are supposed

to do, we should learn what actually happened, analyze and determine what counter measures should be taken, and then pass that information on to all the employees.

Discipline is not the answer to how an accident took place.

The *M-39* beginning at Section 115.1 explains the basic principle of discipline as:

...The delivery manager must make every effort to correct a situation before resorting to disciplinary measures...

115.2 ...Managers can accomplish their mission only through the effective use of people. How successful a manager is in working with people will, to a great measure, determine whether or not the goals of the Postal Service are attained...

M-39 at Section 115.3 continues by explaining management's responsibilities to employees as related to discipline by stating:

"...When problems arise, managers must recognize that they have an obligation to their employees and to the Postal Service to look to themselves, as well as to the employee...The manager has the responsibility to resolve as many problems as possible before they become grievances...If the employee's stand has merit, admit it and correct the situation..."

"Your supervisors should stop blaming the employee and start looking at themselves to foster a safer work culture where reporting of accidents results in learning the root cause—not in the shortest route to blame."

In the above case, the carrier made it clear that he did not see the bee before he was stung, yet management still issued discipline and blamed him. The discipline issued is devoid of proof of any wrongdoing. Further, the issuance of the discipline in the above case does absolutely nothing more than to stop others from reporting accidents.

Fear is not the answer, so your supervisors should stop blaming the employee and start looking at themselves to foster a safer work culture where reporting of accidents results in learning the root cause—not in the shortest route to blame.

Then, and only then, will we reduce accidents and injuries and the cost that is associated with them.

Keep an eye on each other.