

Safety depends on USPS management



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What does the slogan “Safety depends on you!” really mean?

Throughout my 41 years with USPS, I have paid attention to all matters brought to my attention on safety, including slogans, programs, joint ventures, bargained agreements, ergonomics, maintenance and attitudes—attitudes of employees as well as those of their supervisors/managers on the subject of their sincere acceptance of the importance of safety.

The above-quoted motto is supposed to create a warm and fuzzy acceptance, by you, of everyone’s obligation to work safely. But what about your managers? How do they fit into that statement? Are they

committed to safety, or do you picture them pointing at you like the suggestion in the motto?

In my July 2015 column, I addressed accident investigation designed to get to the true cause of an accident. That column included a diagram of the Hierarchy of Controls, a visualization of solutions to safety hazards. The diagram showed that the most effective solutions are found at the top of the pyramid and the least effective are at the bottom.

The top of the pyramid is labeled “Elimination/Substitution” of the hazard and the bottom of that diagram is labeled “Personal Protective Equipment.” Now, let’s use an example to think about this concept. Let us consider how vehicle fires could be addressed in that diagram.

At the top of the pyramid, we get rid of all LLVs (which I and almost every letter carrier in the country would embrace), and at the bottom, USPS fits every single letter carrier with a NASCAR-approved fire suit.

Pretty simple concept. Fix the problem (eliminate the hazard), or find a way to work with it (put on protective equipment).

Each and every day, our craft is faced with a hazard of one type or another. Once you recognize a hazard, you have a choice to make. Report a vehicle defect by filling out a vehicle repair tag (if applicable) or a PS Form 1767 for most other hazards and submit to management for their follow-up, and then bring the problem to the attention of your shop steward or your branch officers so that they can follow up if necessary. (Please see the August 2020 Contract Talk to review some of your rights and management’s responsibilities relating to the processing of PS Form 1767.)

If you report the hazard, you contribute to eliminating it and prevent someone else from becoming a victim. If you don’t report it, you run the risk of being harmed by that hazard, or letting someone else suffer an injury or worse. Have you ever suffered an injury

where the hazard causing the injury was known by others and not reported? That in itself is quite disappointing.

In my experience, the likelihood of you reporting the hazard is based on your past experience. If you report a hazard and it is abated (eliminated), you are more likely to report hazards as you discover them, and you are more likely to encourage others to do the same.

The attitudes of your supervisors on your safety makes a bigger impact on the above motto than any claims they make in a stand-up talk.

Prior to the arrival of COVID-19, during my travels I had attended many stand-up talks that were supposed to be on safety. I say “supposed to be” because there might have been a brief comment on safety, but it was not educational in the least. For example, I have heard the words “be safe” with no other instruction and then that was recorded as a safety talk. That is b&#\$%&t.

When your supervisor/manager/postmaster gives a safety talk, do you measure what they say against the way they have behaved in the past? Do you believe what they say? Do they prove their commitment to safety by their actions, or is it just lip service? Do your supervisors push you down to the next level of the pyramid and ask what size fire suit you need?

We can make a difference, and we do when we get involved. I often ask that you keep an eye on each other. In this case, I also ask that you act on what you see by reporting hazards, reach out to the union and provide evidence. Get your supervisors to understand that safety depends on them even more than you.

