

‘But I reported it’



**Manuel L.
Peralta Jr.**

In this space and in Contract Talk, we previously have shared the need to report hazards in order to address safety problems. This month, I address what should follow.

If you conduct your vehicle inspection on a daily basis (which you should), you would begin to notice when something is different. You might notice a puddle of fluids under your vehicle. This should alert you to the need to take some form of action, and your first action should be to turn in a vehicle repair tag (PS Form 4565).

The form provides a space to identify the vehicle number, the mileage on the vehicle, the date and time on which you submit the report to your supervisor, and what you believe to be the hazard or defect requiring action. The form also provides a space for your supervisor to sign to acknowledge your report, so that you may keep a copy for your records with your supervisor's signature. If your supervisor refuses to sign and give you your receipt (proof), you should contact your shop steward or your branch officers and ask that a grievance be filed over your supervisor's refusal to sign and provide you with your receipt.

If your supervisor is enlightened, you will receive your receipt of the repair tag with your supervisor's signature. Keep that document for your records. Take a picture of it on your smartphone if necessary, but do not discard your proof. You or the union may need it in the future for further action.

“All management really has to do is follow the rules as they wrote them.”

Separate from the above, you may notice hazards in your office, on your path to your vehicle, or on your route. If you notice defective equipment, you should tag the equipment with the PS Form 4707. Management's responsibility would then be to make certain that the equipment is taken out of service until it is repaired. The *EL-801, Supervisor's Safety Handbook*, states:

[Take tagged equipment] to be repaired or warehoused in

an area designated for defective equipment. Do not remove tags until repairs are completed. Do not allow anyone to place a defective piece of equipment back into service until appropriate repairs are completed.

In November of 2020, my column addressed the safety slogan “Safety Depends on Me.” I believe that safety depends on management. Why? Because I strongly believe that management can pretend and preach all they want about the safe work environment, and they can claim all they want about what they are doing to make your job safer, but until they do make it safer, they are attempting to deflect responsibility away from themselves by claiming that safety depends on you.

Safety depends on craft employees working as safely as they can, reporting hazards, defective equipment and defective vehicles, and then having management respond properly by promptly investigating and abating hazards, arranging for the repair of defective equipment and vehicles, and showing that they believe in the safety program. All management really has to do is follow the rules as they wrote them.

In my March 2017 column, I wrote about “La Palanca” as an example of management's attitude on safety. The union had notified management of a hazard, but management did not take any action until the report of the hazard was documented, therefore on record, and the employer would be responsible in the event that a tragedy happened. You can find a link to that article on the NALC website off of the “Safety and Health” page. In that column, I recommended that you submit a 1767 when you see a hazard.

In closing, you can make a difference by reporting hazards using the appropriate mechanism. If you report a vehicle defect, and your supervisor keeps the vehicle in service by assigning the defective vehicle to an unsuspecting new employee, you should reach out to your shop steward or branch officers to initiate a grievance. If you know that a defective vehicle or piece of equipment was reported but not taken out of service, you also should submit a 1767 and bring your concern to the union immediately.

We frequently discover that an employee, acting in good faith, reports a hazard expecting the issue to be corrected. If the issue is not addressed, the employee becomes disappointed in the system and does not reach out to anyone else to seek further help. This happens more often when the office does not have a highly visible union and management safety commitment.

Get involved and keep an eye on each other.