

Safety ambassador program update



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In April 2018, I wrote an article titled “Management sinks the safety ambassador ship.” I compared the Postal Service’s Safety Ambassador Program to the maiden voyage of the RMS Titanic. This was not as big a story as the Titanic, but the timing was good, and the implementation of the Safety Ambassador Program was a foreseeable tragedy that could have been avoided.

This whole deal started with management notifying us in a letter dated Oct. 12, 2017, that:

The Postal Service proposes to establish national guidelines for the existing Safety Captain Program and rebrand it as Safety Ambassador Program.

The purpose of the proposed Safety Ambassador Program is to design a

standardized safety program based on the existing and locally developed Safety Captain Program....

Had this been true, the Safety Ambassador Program, as a national initiative, could have been highly successful. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

At the time, many offices around the country did have a locally developed safety awareness initiative called the Safety Captain Program. This joint program had been around for many years. The Safety Captain Program was designed to take a “peer on peer” approach to safety awareness. This program was built on two important principles:

1. NALC chose the NALC safety captains.
2. No observations made and/or recorded by safety captains could be used for disciplinary purposes.

We met with management a few times to discuss the issue, and made it very clear to them that if they wanted us to get on board with their proposed Safety Ambassador Program, they would have to honor those principles. We followed our meetings with written questions. The questions we raised were designed to see whether the proposed Safety Ambassador Program was really going to be based on the Safety Captain Program as advertised.

Management sounded pretty good when we met with them, but when we got their official answers to our written questions back, it became clear that they were not going to honor either principle that the Safety Captain Program was built on.

We sent the Postal Service a response letter that stated, in part:

...it is clear that the proposed Safety Ambassador Program principles are not based on the existing and locally developed Safety Captain Program as stated in your October 12, 2017 letter.

For instance, observations made and/or recorded by Safety Captains could not be used for disciplinary purposes under any cir-

cumstances. Based on your answer to this concern, this will no longer be true for Safety Ambassadors. This destroys the integrity of the “peer on peer” safety awareness approach that is at the heart of the Safety Captain Program.

Additionally, the Safety Captain Program is a joint program where the NALC chooses our representatives that serve as Safety Captains. The proposed Safety Ambassador Program is a unilateral program. According to your answers, current Safety Captains will only be permitted to serve as Safety Ambassadors if the installation head appoints them to serve in this capacity. The installation head will also choose the NALC Safety Ambassadors in offices that do not currently have the Safety Captain Program.

It is for these reasons the NALC is not in a position to participate in the proposed Safety Ambassador Program in its current form.

We followed up by advising NALC activists not to serve as safety ambassadors for this program in its current form. We also filed a national grievance based on our belief that the creation of the unilateral Safety Ambassador Program to replace the joint Safety Captain Program created changes in working conditions that were not fair, reasonable or equitable. The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union filed national grievances over the issue as well.

The APWU’s national grievance was scheduled to be heard Feb. 3-4. Prior to that hearing, the Postal Service finally recognized the reality that the RMS Safety Ambassador had floundered and sunk on its maiden voyage back in 2018.

USPS sent us a letter dated Jan. 31 that states in relevant part:

This is in reference to our October 12, 2017, Article 19 notification advising of the Postal Services’ proposal to establish a formalized program to use safety captains. The program was entitled the Safety Ambassador Program. The Intent of this program was to create a standardized safety captain program based on the programs being used in some locations at the time.

Prior to nationwide implementation of the program, the Postal Service met with several of the employee organizations and made the decision to revise the Safety Ambassador Program based on feedback received during these discussions. However, publication of any such revisions was deferred due to the ongoing discussions with the employee organizations.

Since that-time, and based upon further discussions with our employee organizations, the Postal Service has determined that the Safety Ambassador Program will be discontinued. All related materials will be removed from circulation effective immediately.

We withdrew our national grievance without prejudice to our position based on the Postal Service’s decision to discontinue its Safety Ambassador Program.

This news officially opens the door again for us to participate in a locally developed “peer on peer” approach to safety awareness, so long as NALC chooses our representatives and no observations made and/or recorded can be used for disciplinary purposes.