



Alabama Trucking Association  
Workers Compensation Fund



An OSHA Cooperative Program

*A Newsletter For Our Members Where Safety Is Our Primary Concern!*

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## Speaking Up About Safety to Your Co-Workers!

Safety should be easy to talk about, given that it's in everyone's best interest. Whether the safety talk is given by a safety pro, a front-line supervisor or a discussion between co-workers, it should be easy. So why is it difficult sometimes? Why does the advice seem to fall on deaf ears?

### A Dangerous Proposition

Giving out safety advice should come naturally and be accepted, right? So why is it hard for workers to say something to a co-worker when something seems unsafe? The following could shed some light on the subject.

- **Culture:** We're taught to be nice and mind our own business. A company can find it hard to overcome this culture barrier.
- **People Don't Like Being Told What to do:** Having your workers understand that safety is everyone's job regardless of where the advice is coming from can be an uphill battle.
- **Workers Don't Believe They're in Danger:** They believe they've heard it before or believe what they're doing is safe.
- **Workers See Aggression:** Sometimes the "Safety Police" comes out when co-workers give safety advice. This is a natural response for some people when they see a co-worker performing a risky behavior.
- **Change the Tone:** How we deliver our "safety advice" has as much impact on the behavior as the advice itself. We must retire the "safety police" and "gotcha" approach. Take a persuasive approach rather than regulatory approach.
- **Speak the Worker's Language:** If a worker doesn't accept safety advice, whether it's from a co-worker, a supervisor or a safety person, it's because nobody gave them a good enough reason why.
- **Demonstrate Care and Concern:** Workers must care about their well-being as well as their co-worker's wellbeing. This is a culture piece that most companies and workers overlook.
- **Focus on Specifics:** Instead of saying "this is what you did wrong" try being specific about how the action could have caused an injury. Remember to care!
- **Get (and give) Permission:** Ask your co-workers to give you advice if they see you doing something unsafe. Ask your co-workers if you can give them advice if you see them performing an unsafe act.

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### Speaking Up About Safety to Your Co-Workers, *continued*

- **Don't Be Intimidated:** Remember, safety is everyone's job.
- **Lead By Example:** Remember, SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S JOB!

#### A Culture of Collaboration

Ultimately, no matter how good someone is at crafting and delivering safety messages, success will be limited if company culture doesn't value safety or encourage collaborative give and take. This collaboration starts with the leaders of the company.

It's important to note that just as much effort should be put into developing the skill of receiving safety messages as giving them. No one can keep an entire organization safe on his or her own. Collaboration is needed to create a healthy atmosphere around safety conversations and a culture where everyone looks out for each other.

## Acceptance of 'Near Compliance' at Work

The longer we perform an at-risk behavior without a negative outcome, the more we're convinced that we're not going to get hurt by that behavior. Extend that reasoning to every individual in your organization and you can see the exposure cost of low compliance increases exponentially.

Think about speeding when you drive. To get a negative outcome from speeding – getting a ticket, for example – a few things must happen:

- You must be speeding, a police officer needs to be in the immediate vicinity, that officer needs to be able to detect your speed, that officer needs to be free to pull you over, your car needs to be the fastest in the group going by, that officer needs to be in the mood to stop you

Of these six factors, as the driver, you control only one: speed. Once you speed, the outcome is out of your control. If any of these six factors is missing, the negative outcome is avoided. Therefore, in the workplace, we can have so much near compliance of safety rules yet so few negative outcomes.

#### How cognitive dissonance factors into near-compliance

Complicating matters is the principle of cognitive dissonance – or the discomfort you feel when your behavior doesn't match your attitude. If your attitude is that going 5 mph over the speed limit is not acceptable, you're going to adjust your behavior and slow down to match that attitude. Further, if you change your behavior to drive 6 mph

over the speed limit and you don't suffer a negative outcome, your attitude eventually will change to match your new behavior.

The problem with near-compliance is that cognitive dissonance works against safety. We don't feel uncomfortable going a little faster than the speed limit. In fact, our attitude is aligned exactly with our behavior – although we have put ourselves in an at-risk situation by not fully complying with the stated speed limit.

#### How to address the issue

The first step in addressing individual acceptance of near-compliance on the job is education. You must educate the individual. Everyone must ask himself or herself:

- Why do I knowingly vary from safety standards?
- Do I fully understand the reason behind the standards and limits?
- Do I understand that I lose control of my safety once I place myself at risk?
- What factors in my near-compliance situations at work are usually missing that allow me to not have a negative outcome?
- How could I remain in compliance and still achieve a positive outcome (i.e., faster production)?

Once you have these answers, then look to change your behaviors to better serve your positive outcomes. Our attitudes will follow.