

Safety Stewards ponder new approaches to keeping work safe

BROTHER'S

By Eric Wolfe

You're at work. Somebody wants to pull out an underground cable using a truck because it's faster than using a capstan. You know there's a chance the cable could break and come whipping out of the hole. Not good.

So what do you do? Do you speak up?

When people take shortcuts, other members of the crew often "turn their head because they don't want to have a confrontation," said Richard Danieli, a PG&E Transmission Troublemaker and Local 1245 safety steward.

It can be hard to approach a fellow employee who is cutting corners. It's especially hard to speak up if it's about something you yourself might have done in the past, said Jon McCue, a safety steward and Line Foreman for Liberty Energy. "You feel kind of like a hypocrite, saying 'Hey man, don't do that.'"

So what do you do?

That question was pondered long and hard by 82 members who attended a two-day Safety Summit at Weakley Hall on May 1-2 in Vacaville. They came from PG&E, NV Energy, Turlock Irrigation District, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, the City of Redding, Frontier Communications, Davey Tree, Wright Tree and Trees Inc.

These members do different kinds of work—electric, gas, tree trimming, communications. But at one time or another, they've all seen the same problem: a worker taking a shortcut.

And shortcuts can send someone to the hospital, or to an early grave.

Start a Conversation

Over the past couple of years, Local 1245 has built a network of safety stewards to address a rash of workplace fatalities and serious injuries. Their purpose is not to scold rule breakers or set somebody up for disciplinary action. Their purpose is to keep people from getting hurt.

So what do you do when a crewmate takes an unnecessary risk? Try this: start a conversation.

"There are ways of communicating that are non-toxic, that don't promote anger," said Local 1245 Business Rep Rich Lane, a former TIID lineman who organized the conference. "By taking a non-judgmental approach, you don't put the other person on the defensive."

Ron Martin, a communication specialist, explored the topic in some depth during the first day of the conference. His message: communication is a two-way street. It means listening as well as talking.

"You're going to be dealing with people who are not going to want to make a change, or don't even recognize that something is wrong," said Lane. "You have to take the approach that, 'I have a message for you, you have a message for me, let's talk this over.'"

The safety steward is not a supervisor. Their goal is not to change behavior

by a threat of punishment. The goal is to increase safety awareness on the job, and remind people that we all want to get home alive each day.

Making jobs safer

The hazards people face in this line of work are legion.

"Everything's dangerous," said Rob Dinsmore, a line clearance tree trimmer with Wright Tree Service. "You can fall. You can get hit by objects. You can cut yourself."

You can also be electrocuted, gassed, injured in an explosion, hit by a car, attacked by animals—or by people who act like animals.

Ernie Peña knows. He was on his way to investigate a gas leak when an angry citizen—who happened to be the recipient of several PG&E shut-off notices—shot him with a 357. Peña survived, but was astonished to learn some months later that a co-worker was given the same tag just 20 minutes after Peña was shot.

Yes, supervisors can be part of the problem, and when they show poor judgment on safety matters there needs to be a conversation about it. But don't expect to change their behavior by berating or scolding.

"People commonly bring complaints to supervision and say 'This is wrong,' but they don't identify how to fix it or bring about a change," said Lane. You're more likely to get change if you can point out that the supervisor could get better results by following a different course.

"It's a lot like negotiating," said Lane. A two-way street.

One Little Misstep

Sometimes safety issues are a result of wider company policies, something the supervisor may have little control over. Case in point: staffing. When you're short-staffed, all those great overtime opportunities can start taking a toll.

"When you're exhausted, when you're tired, you tend to forget, you tend to miss steps," said Lington Gordon, a PG&E fieldman. "One little misstep could cause an explosion, could cost a life or a limb."

Union leaders have wrangled with PG&E, NV Energy and other employers through the years about staffing levels. Safety stewards, obviously, have little influence on their company's staffing policies. But there are ways they can try to minimize the threat to safety. When there's a ton of overtime, for example,



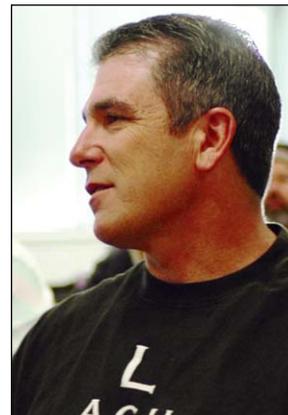
Mike Scafani, PG&E, is on Control the Pressure.



Rob Dinsmore, Wright Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.



Carlos Rodriguez, Utility Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.



Joe Joaquim, PG&E, is on the Local 1245 Health and Safety Committee.



Scott Mahnke, Utility Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.



Richard Danieli, PG&E, is on Hold the Pull.



Ernie Pena, PG&E, is on Control the Pressure.



John McCue, Liberty Energy, is on Hold the Pull.



Ray Banfill, Utility Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.

Local 1245 is continuing to build our network of safety stewards, and provides resources to those who volunteer to serve in this position. Besides training conferences like the May gathering in Vacaville, safety stewards are supported by the union's three peer-to-peer safety committees: Hold the Pull (Electric), Control the Pressure (Gas), and Keep the Clearance (Tree Trimmers). If you are interested in being a safety steward, contact Rich Lane at rvl5@ibew1245.com

KEEPER

they can remind members to recognize the signs of fatigue, and to not be shy about asking for help.

"If you get tired you have a right to tell a supervisor, 'I can't drive that truck in,'" said Gordon. Point out to the supervisor it would be a hazard to the public as well as the employee to put a sleepy driver in a rig for a long drive back to the yard. "You need to get someone to drive that rig, or park it here, drive me home."

These are the sorts of things that safety stewards can bring up with their fellow members going into storm season. When summer's on the horizon, said Gordon, "you start talking about heat stroke." Don't be shy, he says. "Just bring it up."

Looking Out for Each Other

Utility jobs cannot be made completely safe. But they can be made safer, if people remain alert to the risks—and communicate.

Members of a crew already tend to look out for each other. One role of the safety steward is to reinforce that bond, help members keep sight of the fact that they hold each other's lives in their hands.

"I'm with them more than I am with my own family," Danieli said of his union brothers. "And sometimes we can't stand each other—we fight like

brothers. But at the end of the day I don't want to see anybody.."

Danieli doesn't need to finish the sentence. None of us wants to see anybody going to the mortuary instead of going home at night. Danieli names some of the brothers who didn't make it home from work—Max and Felipe—and Brett, who lost his arms.

"I knew those guys all personally, coming up together. It's a brotherhood," said Danieli.

Dane Moore, a PG&E Electric Crew Foreman, freely acknowledges he had wilder days as a young man. But at some



Business Rep Richard Lane heads the Peer-to-Peer safety initiative.



Justin Casey, Davey Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.



Chuck Ritter, Utility Tree, is on Keep the Clearance.



Dane Moore, PG&E, is on Hold the Pull.



John Kent, PG&E, is on Hold the Pull.



Lington Gordon, PG&E, is on Control the Pressure.

point—marriage, kids—he got a new perspective. "I decided to try and be safe and teach that for everyone."

He isn't sure exactly what it will take to help people "make that transition from being a rule breaker, a risk taker." But he told his fellow safety stewards at the safety summit that they had a responsibility to try.

"I don't want any more serious

injuries. I love all you guys, I care about every one of you guys. I don't want to see this anymore. We got to be our brother's keeper. We got to do it."

For a fact, IBEW Local 1245 safety stewards don't have all the answers. But they're asking some of the right questions, starting important conversations, and looking for ways to be their brother's keeper.

Distracted driving: the #1 killer of youth

By Rich Lane

In the last 25 years one million deaths have occurred on the nation's highways, according to National Safety Council Senior Director of Transportation Dave Teater. But by far the largest killer of those between the ages of 15 and 24 years is distracted driving, claiming 35,000 young people per year.

With the advent of the cell phone over 30 years ago, the phenomenon of distracted driving has produced alarming statistics and numerous studies related to how the human brain functions while using a cell phone or texting while driving. The latest statistics compiled in 2011 attribute 213,000 crashes to texting while driving and 1.1 million to cell phone use, numbers largely considered to be underreported by law enforcement.

In physiological terms the human brain is conditioned to do one thing well and when taxed with other tasks will chose to focus on the cell phone conversation over driving on the road.

"Cell phone use is the driving equivalent of .08 blood alcohol content," Teater says. "When you use a cell phone the same effect takes place, the vision narrows, attention dulled and peripheral vision impaired..hands-free is not danger-free—the same effect takes place regardless."

Teater ought to know. His 9-year old son was killed by a driver who ran a stop light while using a cell phone. Now Teater's mission is to spread the word on the tragedy of distracted driving.

Distracted driving is catching the attention of many others across the nation, including national corporations and small business. Coca Cola was sued for \$21 million by a driver who was injured in an accident. It was proved that Coke had no distracted driving policy.

Companies are also finding that using a cell phone for company business does not equate to a more productive employee. Studies have shown that business decisions made while driving are less effective due to a 37% drop in brain activity. Finally, over 2,000 companies who have put in place "no cell phone use while driving" policies have recorded only a 1.5% drop in productivity.

What can you do to reduce distracted driving while on the road?

Try a 30-day test. Put a statement on your pick-up message that you support reducing distracted driving and will not answer while driving. Make a note of how many urgent calls you receive—most likely you will not have many. Prepare your family and co-workers so they know what you are doing. Tell those who may need to contact you in an emergency to call twice in quick succession and you will pull off the road and call back.

At the end of the 30-day trial evaluate the impact this call-free trial had on your commute, work day and driving experience. Chances are the world didn't come to an end, and that the road was a little safer for everybody. Try it, and see what you find out.

Rich Lane is the Local 1245 Business Representative responsible for the peer-to-peer safety program.