

Subdistrict Embraces Accountability to Create Safe Work Environment

Just more than a year after forming a subdistrict safety team, Gary Subdistrict employees are taking personal accountability to interact more harmoniously, reinforce safety practices more proactively, and – for an exclamation point – develop innovations to prevent hazards in the workplace.

The employees behind the innovations were rewarded in late May with newly implemented Safety Innovation Awards. However, the “reward” goes beyond bonuses.



Gary Subdistrict's (from left) Vincent Mead, TyNeal Bryant, Joel Kritenbrink and Alfred Carrales receive certificates for their roles on the subdistrict's safety team.

“Work is much more rewarding and satisfying when you are given the platform to voice opinions about safety, and – in turn – changes are made,” said Highway Technician Alfred Carrales, a member of the subdistrict safety team.

The safety teams are composed of volunteers from non-supervisory and management personnel in

the Greenfield, LaPorte and Vincennes districts. Each unit, shop, and traffic division has a leader on the team, officially considered branches of the Statewide Safety team. Meetings include open-forum discussions where potential safety problems are raised and addressed.

“The culture change has been remarkable,” said LaPorte District Safety Director Keith Norred. “The Statewide Safety team is listening, I’m listening, and district managers are listening to these employees. As a result, we’re making positive changes.”

Said Highway Technician TyNeal Bryant, a member of the subdistrict safety team: “I’ve been here for 10 years, and the past 1½ years have by far been the best for safety. If you’re scared to talk, dangerous conditions can’t be changed. Now nobody is scared to talk, and changes are being made.”

These changes are also helping new employees. Highway Technician Vincent Mead, also on the subdistrict safety team, said six of the nine members of his Miller Unit are new to INDOT. Under the current culture, he and his workmates are more apt to emphasize safety to the newcomers.

Carrales said management’s former mentality of “sweeping problems under the rug and not listening or making changes” led to low morale. However, management’s new philosophy not only is boosting morale, but it is promoting innovation.

The new \$500 Safety Innovation Awards were presented to Highway Technicians Gary Seng and Michael Riggs during a special Gary Subdistrict Safety Day in late May.

Seng improved the “Road Work Ahead” and other signs that are attached to attenuators. Previously, cloth or vinyl signs were attached to attenuators by bungee cords, but strong winds would tear or blow off the signs after a few trips down the highway.

Seng designed a sign holder that is bolted to the attenuator (welding would have compromised the structural integrity of the unit) and allows the use of interchangeable metal signs, which are secured by hangers and fortified by a chain. The new method secures the sign better than bungee straps did because the sign stays stiff and unaffected by the wind.

“Another positive is that the process of placing and removing the signs from the rack is safe, quick and easy,” said Norred.

Riggs used scrap parts from units and shops to “invent” a modified blade lift. The blade lift, made of metal struts, allows an employee to change plow blades without having to lift the plow up and down. After a plow blade is placed on jack strands, it can be secured to the modified blade lift. From there, an employee can align and then bolt a new blade and carbide inserts into place.

“We conducted a job hazard analysis and found this to be a safe activity that helps eliminate lifting, fall and trip hazards,” said Norred. “Hats off to Gary and Michael on these two innovations, which prove that working smarter trumps working harder.”

Others in the subdistrict have taken notice. For instance, Gary Subdistrict Highway Maintenance Operations Manager Jim Rotzien organized the Safety Day to celebrate the safe actions of his crews.

“I want to thank the Statewide Safety team for starting this process, the Gary Subdistrict safety team for partnering with the statewide team and facilitating safe activities to fellow employees, and all other subdistrict workers for not only taking safety tips to heart, but also speaking out and coming up with new ideas,” said Rotzien.

“This entire process has been a huge shot in the arm for morale, and I can assure everyone that we will continue to push forward to nurture this environment throughout the subdistrict.”

For more photos of the innovations and Gary Subdistrict Safety Day activities, click [here](#).



This modified blade lift was created by Michael Riggs (right). Gary Seng, who improved sign holders attached to attenuators, poses with Riggs.