

New Recognition Program Empowers Employees, Creates Safer Workplaces



Tipton Unit Highway Technician Jack Goodnight (left) accepts a check from Greenfield District Highway Maintenance Director J.D. Brooks in January.

Safety first, not second.

INDOT is actively reshaping its hierarchy when it comes to safety, empowering employees at job sites to take control and ensure a safe workplace for themselves and their co-workers.

The new Safety Recognition Program is part of that new culture.

“We want feedback from the frontline on what they need from us,” said Statewide Safety Director Angela Smith. “Our new program is enabling employees to tell us what they require to create a safer environment, and we are delivering it to them. This isn’t lip service, it’s action.”

Smith and her staff have created subdistrict safety teams, officially considered branches of the Statewide Safety team. Each unit, shop and traffic division now has a subdistrict safety team leader, made up of non-supervisory or non-management maintenance personnel from highway technicians on up.

The first safety team was installed in the Greenfield District’s Indianapolis Subdistrict last November. By January, these teams populated the entire Greenfield District’s maintenance areas. The Vincennes District followed in March with safety teams assigned in all appropriate maintenance areas. The LaPorte District’s Gary Subdistrict will field a safety team in April. Once the LaPorte District fills all maintenance areas with safety teams, the other three districts will follow in 2015.

Each month, subdistrict safety team leaders nominate employees from their particular unit, shop or traffic division who exhibit proactive safety behaviors. Each nominated employee receives an appreciation card and is entered into a monthly drawing for a \$250 safety appreciation bonus. If the employee’s action averted extreme danger or their idea becomes implemented statewide, a special \$500 safety leadership bonus may be awarded.

“This system is a great way to provide a direct line of two-way communication from the field,” said Tipton Unit Highway Technician Brent Munns, the safety



These Tipton Subdistrict highway technicians also are safety team leaders for their respective units: Paul Sampson, Westfield Unit; Dana Reeves, Fortville Unit; Rex Burket, Kokomo Unit; and Brent Munns, Tipton Unit.



leader for that unit. “Front-line workers are talking to us, and we’re talking directly with the Statewide Safety team. Already, this has brought positive change.”

Smith said: “And that’s not the only thing. From here on out, we will solicit feedback from these subdistrict safety team leaders with any proposed safety policy change.”

The objective of the Safety Recognition Program – which has the slogan “In the Zone: Expect the Unexpected” – is for employees to proactively recognize unsafe acts or conditions, feel comfortable in pointing them out to subdistrict safety leaders, and thus help prevent future accidents and injuries.



“I think this is great,” said Darrick Davis, an electrician technician – and the safety leader – in the Greenfield District’s traffic department. “Field employees are being more observant. Those who have been nominated for the appreciation cards and possible monthly bonus have pointed out improper personal protective equipment, standing water in units due to a dip in the pavement, and much more. One even suggested an electronic ‘know your speed’ radar sign for maintenance work zones, and this has already been piloted.”

Greenfield Subdistrict Shop Mechanic Jeff Sorrell, the shop’s safety leader, said: “The trust level between front-line workers and the Statewide Safety team has skyrocketed. We feel we can openly share our observations about safety, and even convey the ‘near-misses’ where something didn’t go wrong but easily could have. These near-misses can teach lessons. With this improved culture, we feel at ease sharing these facts and stories, knowing that all of INDOT is on the same team.”

The new focus is already paying dividends. There have been only three injuries in the Indianapolis Subdistrict since the inception of the Safety Recognition Program in November to the end of February. There were eight injuries during that same four-month time span the previous year.

“We want to proactively address any potential hazards in the workplace ahead of time – to prevent injuries or crashes – which is a much better alternative than being reactive after an injury or crash,” said Smith. “Engaging our employees for feedback is the perfect way to make that happen.”

For more information about the Safety Recognition Program, [click here](#).

First in a series about safety at INDOT.