

What is this CARE program you are hearing about?



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In a letter dated Nov. 16, USPS notified NALC of its newest program intended to prevent accidents through the use of accident statistics, enhanced awareness and root-cause analysis. I will specify that this is the Postal Service's program, because management developed the program on its own and not with any NALC input.

As a backdrop, the NALC-USPS National Safety Task Force (Accident Control Team) has been meeting with the USPS for many years seeking to jointly identify and solve issues related to safety.

In October 2013, our committee's agenda included city carrier assistant retention (which had already become a major problem) and at-fault motor vehicle accidents involving newer employees and Sunday parcel deliveries (which used web-based driving instructions that took a driver's attention away from the road). Our committee was seeking to jointly identify the various causes of newer employee vehicle accidents, so that we could develop solutions that would help prevent these accidents.

During the process of our discussions, it was determined that support from the right USPS power brokers would be a necessary element to achieve our goals. A manager on the committee suggested getting this initiative sponsored by the USPS internal management Lean Six Sigma program. That was the last the NALC members of the committee heard of our joint project, in spite of numerous NALC efforts to get updates.

The November letter to the NALC was the first notice that our joint project had grown a life of its own through the management structure. The USPS management program is titled "Counseling At Risk Employees" (CARE). A review of the document provides a number of statements that management states are intended to protect the employee from adverse action.

In the section titled "Purpose," it states: "The CARE program, including the interactive process with the employee, will be used solely for the purpose of improving employee safety. *The program will not be used to take administrative action against the employee.*" (Emphasis added.)

In the section titled "Dos and Don'ts," it states: "Don't discuss corrective action and Don't assess blame." (See my July 2015 column, "Are we Abating Hazards or Blaming Behavior?")

In the counseling questionnaire, it states: "CARE offers

support and resources to ensure you have the knowledge and/or tools necessary to perform your job safely. This program is not to gather information for any type of corrective action...Care Team members will not discuss the CARE meeting with any employees."

In the section titled "Measuring National Results," you will find the following statement: "The Area Safety office will ensure eligible District employees have the opportunity to participate in the CARE program, develop a Participant Action Plan with measurable objectives, and receive guidance and strategies to avoid accidents. The Participant Action Plan will be maintained locally until the targeted outcome is achieved; *documents will be shredded when Participant successfully completes CARE.*" (Emphasis added.)

NALC met with USPS and identified our concern that local management oversees the CARE program. These are the same managers who put performance before your safety and they, in turn, will not *care* enough to protect you from harm.

"If your local supervisors, your managers and your postmasters truly *care* about your safety, they will find a way to keep you out of harm's way."

Another issue of concern to the NALC is the potential for abuse, by your local managers, of the CARE information, in spite of the fact that the program clearly instructs management not to use any of this information against you. A copy of the letter to the NALC (USPS3959) is available on our Safety and Health page at nalc.org for your use in defending against any action taken against you based on information acquired through the CARE program.

During our meeting with management, we also suggested modification of their questionnaire by adding the following: "Have you been allowed to do what you were trained to do?" Our experience shows that we frequently receive training on how to do our job safely and then our supervisors tell us to forget what they trained us to do, putting our newer employees at risk. They are forced to balance the safety training they received against the threat that they will lose their job because they are taking too much time. Management did not adopt our recommendation on this subject, so we encourage you to address this in your CARE feedback.

If your local supervisors, your managers and your postmasters truly *care* about your safety, they will find a way to keep you out of harm's way.