

Safety captains needed



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This past summer in Boston, I participated in three workshops. In one, I addressed the Safety Captain Program and the Safety Ambassador Program. Several people believed that the Safety Ambassador Program had replaced the Safety Captain Program and that we lost on our challenge of that issue.

As background, the Safety Captain Program was in existence before I began my career in 1979, and it continued throughout the country until 2017.

In April of 2015, Corey Walton, a member of Branch 4, Nashville, TN, brought to my attention that in his station, the USPS was soliciting applicants from the letter carrier craft to

apply to be safety captains. Corey shared a copy of the solicitation, which identified several “safety captain responsibilities,” such as being an example of a safe and productive employee, participating in accident review boards and in safety meetings, attending safety captain meetings, and several additional items that caused him and me to be concerned.

In May of 2016, I was provided with a copy of a Step B decision that challenged management in San Francisco after they had unilaterally removed the NALC-designated safety captain from his duties and replaced him with two management-selected designees. The resolution of that grievance was that “A violation of the National Agreement was proven when management unilaterally removed the NALC designated Safety Captain.” A portion of the settlement required that the former safety captain be allowed to return to attending the meetings and that any action items were agreed to in his absence will be revisited when he attends.

Within a few more weeks, it was clear that what had appeared to be an isolated solicitation in Nashville was only the tip of the iceberg as stories were brought to my attention from Salt Lake City, UT; Albuquerque, NM; and many other cities. We discovered that management was clearly getting the NALC out of its hair by replacing NALC designees with management’s handpicked representatives.

In October of 2017, the USPS finally came out of the shadows and provided Article 19 notice to the NALC (USPS4249) indicating that it wanted to rebrand the Safety Captain Program and rename it the Safety Ambassador Program. I immediately put together a listing of my concerns, which were

gathered from many of the officers in our regional offices.

The first major concern I had was that management wanted to replace our safety captain selections with management’s selected safety ambassador. The position I took was that under Article 1 of the National Agreement, the NALC is the exclusive bargaining representative for city letter carriers and management had no business making any selection on who represents our interests.

The second major concern is that management wanted to change the rules about how information could be used. In the past, safety captains and “peer to peer observation” information could not be used to support discipline against an employee. For example, if the safety captain observed a carrier committing a safety infraction, that observation could not be used against the employee. The same had always applied to a joint observation by a safety team (supervisor/union representative). The purpose was to encourage the proper safe behavior, not to issue discipline.

Then-President Fredric Rolando agreed with my concerns and appealed the NALC’s challenge to national arbitration under Article 19. While we waited for our arbitration hearing, we asked our NALC activists to not participate in any of the safety ambassador-related meetings.

In the meantime, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) also had challenged the same Article 19 notice it had received. Its grievance was scheduled for arbitration in February 2022. When we received notice of the scheduled hearing, the NALC decided to “intervene” in the case. As soon as the USPS received notification of our intent to intervene on the APWU case, the USPS sent President Rolando a letter dated Jan. 31, 2022 (USPS4828), which in part indicates the following:

...the Postal Service has determined that the Safety Ambassador Program will be discontinued. All related materials will be removed from circulation effective immediately...

Then-Vice President Lew Drass wrote about the ending of the Safety Ambassador Program in his March 2022 column.

By the time you read this month’s column, it has been almost three years since management terminated the Safety Ambassador Program, yet we have not appointed NALC-designated safety captains in each delivery unit throughout the country. If you do not have an NALC safety captain, reach out to your branch president to have one appointed.

Safety is our business, and when management tries to take any of our safety responsibilities away, you know that they are up to something and that the result may cause harm to our members. When I say keep an eye on each other, I mean it.