



SAFETY ALERT

OF THE MONTH

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“See Something, Say Something”:

Why this Advice Doesn't Always Work and How to Change That

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Bill had a feeling that the switchback on the new road was going to be a problem once snow arrived, but he didn't mention it at the crew safety meeting or to the supervisor. Why?

This alert looks at some of the reasons why we do not always speak up when we identify safety concerns.

The adage of “*if you see something, say something*” seems simple, but it can sometimes be hard to do. When you see an unsafe situation at work, does it feel a bit uncomfortable to bring forward? What stops you from speaking up? Do you find yourself thinking any of the following?

- “Things will probably turn out fine.”
- “What if I look like a rookie?”
- “My supervisor never listens to me anyway.”
- “I don't want to look like I can't handle this.”
- “These people have more experience— I'll follow their lead.”
- “Nobody else said anything, so maybe I'm overthinking it.”



The thoughts that go through your head in these situations can often be linked to the crew you work with and the company you work for. Crews often have a group identity, expectations to meet and a reputation to uphold. It doesn't take long for you to get a good idea how you will be judged by your teammates if you don't meet expectations. This crew identity is part of the work culture and often dictates how people behave on the job.

For example: Does your crew pride themselves on being highly productive or have a reputation for not complaining and always getting the job done? This type of culture is positive in terms of being productive, but it can make it challenging to bring forward safety concerns.





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It may seem difficult to bring up safety concerns when the focus is on production, high-quality or even experienced people. Every crew will be different, and you will need to find ways to talk about safety and hazards that fit with the culture.

For example, you may need to focus on how safety measures can reduce incidents which will reduce down-time and increase production.

Crews and companies all have different cultures and identities so framing the safety conversation will need to be specific to those. Try out these talking points:



- “We’re top notch and everything we do is high quality, **including our safety.**”
- “This is my family out here – I spend more time with these people than anyone else, so I want to protect them.”
- “The buddy system – Jim and I have worked side-by-side for many years – he always has my back and I have his.”

Once you have figured out how to talk about safety with your crew, make it a habit. Habits are powerful and hard to break, and they can cement safety into the culture of the crew. Start out all work conversations with a discussion about new hazards, hold regular safety training or start all meetings by sharing something related to safety from home or work.

Additional Resources

- Thanks to Jody Jahn, PhD and the Wildfire Lessons Learned website for the information for this alert. <https://wildfirelessons.blog/2020/08/18/see-something-say-something-why-that-advice-doesnt-always-work-and-how-to-make-it-work-for-your-crew/>

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