



IF THEY SEE SOMETHING WILL THEY SAY SOMETHING?

Are all your staff and volunteers willing to report a physical hazard or liability risk exposure in the organization? Just because you would do it, don't assume others would.

The Washington, D. C. Metro system commissioned a survey of its employees' attitudes toward safety, following a Red Line series of accidents. The results indicated that 15 percent of employees would not report unsafe conditions, for fear of retaliation. Fourteen percent said they did not believe Metro management would take corrective action if such conditions were reported. Incredibly, a Metro spokesman said, "Metro believes that having 85% of its employees comfortable and knowledgeable about reporting a safety violation or concern is a significant success, especially given the culture of just a few years ago."

Would you drink water that was 85% free of the protozoans that were in it when it came from the lake or river? No, and 85% buy-in isn't good enough for an effective risk management system. Yet, employees and volunteers might not be comfortable reporting risk exposures, for a variety of reasons. To move from 85% to 100% requires understanding the reasons for that reluctance.

The Jerry Sandusky child-molestation scandal in State College, PA was allowed to fester and grow for years before the lid blew off. In the aftermath, Wharton School professor John Kimberly conducted a number of interviews to seek answers to the question, "Why do people with integrity behave differently in an organization than they would on their own?" He found that people sometimes do believe they will be ignored, misunderstood or even punished for confronting a problem or potential problem. Sometimes they believe reporting a problem will damage the organization somehow, or the reputations of people to whom they feel close. Other reasons for not stepping up to report a safety problem or other risk exposure include the belief that it is someone else's responsibility to do so; that the reporting system is weak; or that blame will be assigned before all the facts are in.

Is there any reason people in your own organization might have those fears and that reluctance? If so, do everything you can, using all the communication at your disposal, to assure them that you are committed to identifying and addressing risk exposures of every kind, and that it is everyone's responsibility to say something if they see something. Nothing is off the table. There can't be any taboos, and no one gets a pass. Because if a risk can't be discussed, it can't be managed.

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