

“Behavior Based Safety” Versus “Union Based Safety”

Currently, safety programs on the railroad are usually based upon a model commonly known as “behavior based safety”. BBS is just what it says; that is, it is based upon the idea that to make a safer workplace, you must change worker behavior. BBS uses slogans such as “All accidents and injuries are avoidable” and “You will achieve the level of safety to which you aspire.” In other words, if you *do not* get hurt, it is because of your fine actions as an employee. And if you *do* get hurt, well, you obviously did not follow all safety rules properly and therefore it is your behavior that needs modifying.

This model is vastly preferred by corporations, especially rail corporations, because it takes the onus of providing for a safe workplace off of the carrier and places it on you the worker.

The advantages of this model to the carrier include the following:

- ◆ Cost savings resulting from fewer expenditures to eliminate hazards.
- ◆ Lower insurance rates.
- ◆ Worker intimidation.
- ◆ Fewer reportable injuries since workers are tempted to cover up injuries.
- ◆ Erosion of worker and union solidarity and power.

The disadvantages to you as a worker and a union member include:

- ◆ Workplace hazards continue unaddressed since the company simply blames you for any and all accidents or injuries that may result.
- ◆ Workplace hazards continue unaddressed since workers are intimidated to report injuries that result from such hazards.
- ◆ Injuries go unreported and get worse as a result of not reporting.
- ◆ Possible disciplining or termination for reporting a workplace injury.
- ◆ Intimidation, isolation, stress, fear, anger, resentment and betrayal.
- ◆ Weakened solidarity, an air of distrust and blame, less union power.

In comparison, a union based safety program would focus on hazard elimination rather than simply worker behavior. Workers and their unions should be empowered to fully participate in any on-property program, to report workplace injuries as they occur without fear of reprisal, to identify workplace hazards and to actively participate in their removal.

“To counter management's proposal of a behavioral safety programs, unions can propose a comprehensive worksite health and safety program - focusing on identifying and eliminating hazards and utilizing the recognized hierarchy of controls, which supports the elimination of hazards and the use of engineering controls as preferable to lower-level and less effective control measures such as using personal protective equipment.”

-- Nancy Lessin, United Steelworkers Center for Safety & Health

Actions for Union Members and Locals to Consider

- Building local union safety committees, elected by the membership, free and independent of management control where workers can bring forward their concerns and agree upon a strategy.
- To the extent possible, reaching out to other rail crafts and local unions in the terminal in order to build a united front and a common plan of action.
- Then, when dealing with the carrier, looking at safety issues and any “joint” safety program as simply another aspect of bargaining.
- Be willing to talk about worker behavior if and only if, the carrier is willing to talk seriously about hazard abatement and elimination.
- Finally, if the carrier is unwilling to bargain on safety issues in good faith, consider withdrawing from any management safety programs and committees.

What Labor Unions Have to Say About Behavior Based Safety

AFL-CIO *“The AFL-CIO opposes employer programs and policies that shift responsibility for worker safety by focusing on worker behavior instead of workplace hazards and employer mismanagement and that create disincentives to reporting injuries or hazards. We believe such practices undermine worker protection.”*

Transportation Workers Union of America *“Behavior based safety programs generate fear, institutionalize the use of low level controls over higher level engineering controls, create conflict between workers and discourage the reporting of injuries and illnesses and drive problems underground have no place in a health and safety program.”*

United Auto Workers *“Unfortunately, behavior-based safety programs are just a retread of old outdated ideas and strategies that have never been proven effective. Other managers are interested in behavior based safety because they realize this approach shifts responsibility for health and safety to their workers and does not require significant change in the management system. They understand that the emphasis will be on changing the worker and holding the worker responsible for injuries and illnesses.”*

United Steel Workers *“Behavior-based safety programs attempt to change worker behavior. What we have found is that the workplaces using these programs are much more likely not to address the hazards that are in fact the root cause of worker injury, illness and death ... Hazards often do not get identified; and even when identified, do not get fixed. Workers receive feedback from observers that encourages them to work more safely around a hazard, but the hazard itself does not get eliminated or controlled. As long as the hazard remains, the potential for injury or illness remains.”*

Sign Me Up!! I want to join *Railroad Workers United* and help build rail labor unity, democracy & solidarity!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Union _____ Local # _____ Employer _____

Terminal _____ Years of Service _____

Union Position _____

I'd like to join for (check one):

1 year \$50.00 2 Years \$90.00 3 Years \$120.00

Clip and mail together with your dues to:
RWU Secretary P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV 89505

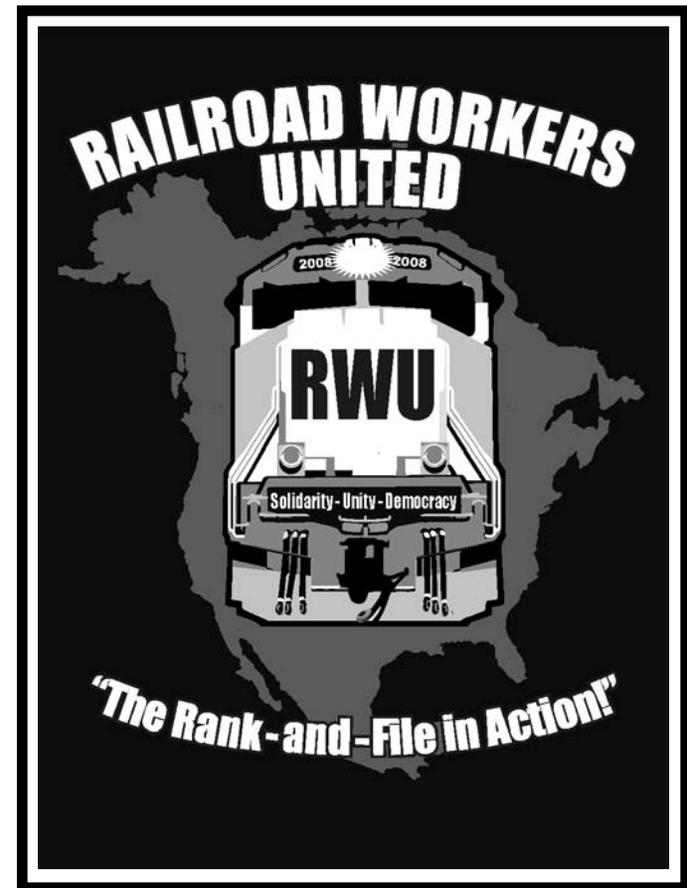
Safety -- Every Member's Job!

Railroad Workers United believes that all union members have a responsibility to building our unions as well as building a safe workplace. In fact, the two go hand-in-hand and are inextricably linked. We need to educate ourselves about the issues, attend union meetings, run for office, work for reforms inside the union, and hold our leaders accountable. We need to take action -- collective action -- together with our fellow workers, to build both a safe workplace and a vital and powerful union presence in the workplace -- every day we go to work!

Are you ready to get involved in the movement for unity, democracy and solidarity? Do you want to help build real safety and real safety committees on the railroad? Contact RWU today. Mail in the form above, call 206-984-3051 or email RWU at:

info@railroadworkersunited.org

Building Union Safety Committees and Real Railroad Safety



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