TOPIC: SAFETY – ROADBLOCKS AND DETOURS

In this series' first topic on safety, I expressed concern over how this area's weekly offerings would be received. From an overall perspective, the best generality on YCPARMIA's various members' safety efforts is inconsistency.   There is inconsistency among members, and within members between departments, and even between units within departments. Some have active, organized and effective programs, while in others safety issues are often ignored. Accidents or near misses are too often characterized as the "employee's fault," and the employer's role in maintaining a safe and healthy work environment is forgotten.

Sitting mostly on the outside of the process, YCPARMIA has come to recognize some not uncommon, but not universal, practices and approaches that undermine our member's safety efforts. They include:

- The failure to have needed safety programs and policies in place. Not just the ones required by Cal/OSHA, but ones that would address unique exposures within the individual entity (note: all departments have some sort of safety exposures, and should have programs/policies to address them). Too often safety programs are in place, but have not been looked at in years, so they are out of date; someone should be periodically looking at them to ensure that they remain viable.

- The failure to train affected staff in the safety programs and policies that the entity does have. In very general terms an entity's policy on something creates a standard or duty that any subsequent actions will be judged against. These policies have no value as semi-secret documents or directions if the affected staff does not know about them, or what is expected of them.

- Having different safety policies or practices for different entity departments. It is difficult to justify or explain why an employer is holding employees to different standards or practices depending on who they are working for within the entity. There needs to be coordination on an entity-wide basis.

- Failure to give affected employees input on the review and modification of safety policies and practices. Recognizing that they are the ones affected by the exposure, and have the most experience in dealing with the risk; their input and buy-in in maintaining and updating the policies and practices should be invaluable.

- Allowing employees to disregard the policies and practices for the sake of getting work done more quickly or more economically. "Getting the job done" becomes the measure of success rather than "getting the job done safely."   Usually there is no consequence, until there is. This is where an employer's actions can speak louder than words, and lip service to safety can alienate staff.

Next Topic: Safety –   Roadblocks and Detours -- continued