



*NAC Position Paper No.25A, June 15, 2012*  
**S A F E T Y**

**Line Leaders Accountability for Safety**  
**"The CSP Trap Case Study"**

Since the advent of safety professionals in the construction industry there have been accountability issues (some recognized and some not recognized) with the question of "Who is in charge of safety?"

The research of the Construction Industry Institute, Austin, Texas has shown that safety excellence includes a top corporate executive charged with the oversight of safety administration; often along with employee health issues, plus some also add to the job role oversight of environmental issues. This paper will only address the safety portion of that role and address it in terms of safety accountability, with the focus on safety accountability extending throughout the organization. All too often employees will simplify the roles of the safety professionals viewing them as all encompassing. All encompassing, to the point that if an issue arises bearing on the subject of safety, then the view of all is, it belongs to the Safety Organization. All encompassing, to the point that if there is an injury the conclusion is; it must be the fault of the safety department.

When this scenario becomes a reality in an organization it is because organizational roles have not been defined or if defined, not defined in accord with the CII research. The CII research spells out the essential fact that when the objective is the elimination of all injuries the resolution of safety related issues should have voice that reports directly to the CEO. Yet the same research also points out that line management must be both responsible and held accountable for the safe execution of all work. These findings when implemented create an organizational "cross-pull." The Safety Department is "pulling in" responsibility so they can be properly accountable for corporate administration of safety while at the same time the line leaders are told to "pull in" safety responsibility and be accountable for safe work execution. It is easy to see the potential for conflict is such a scenario.

How does an organization solve this problem? The answer is by simply defining job roles. Defining job roles in the area of employee safety is not an easy thing to do because of tradition. The CII research on how some employers have left tradition behind to create safety cultures where recordable injury is rare to non-existent creates an opportunity to change this tradition.

To better understand and avoid the "responsibility – accountability for safety issues" let's look at a common scenario in the life of a young but growing construction company through a fictional case study. Though the case study is of a young company the issues are just as prevalent in established older companies.

Allow the portrayal of a typical scenario.

**Case Study:**

*As a company or project grows to the size that the hiring of a safety expert becomes a necessity the company does without a Certified Safety Professional (CSP). But at some point along the way the wisdom of assigning a CSP becomes apparent and the talent search is made. One is found and with some fanfare the arrival of "our new Safety Man" is hailed. Every one welcomes "their new CSP" and the problem of proper utilization is the ever present result. Too many times in the company office whoever in line management has had the lead role in*

*safety quietly and thankfully steps aside to allow maneuvering room for the new “Safety Man.” This is not all bad, this stepping aside, but it can and often is allowed to go too far.*

*When the new Safety Man reports for work the issue of “safety accountability,” though of tremendous importance is often not addressed at all. The typical scenario is that everyone relaxes safety leadership and gives way. Issues bordering on the safety subject are now referred to the CSP. All regulatory issues certainly get directed to the CSP and along with this way too much field accountability for safety suddenly gets dropped on the new CSP as well. Thus the “leadership and management of workplace job execution safety” which up until the day the CSP came on board had been in the proper care of line management all too often falters or sometimes falls between the chairs, so to speak.*

This can be called the “CSP trap;” and line management willingly, sometimes even eagerly falls into it. This “falling” happens as line managers, long weary of doing it all for themselves and wanting to be cooperative begin to drift away from being “accountable” for workplace safety. This is not saying that managers would immediately abort all effort to supervise a safe workplace; what is being said is line managers may, if not very careful, slowly yield accountability.

Whereas “before CSP” it was their responsibility to report any safety incident up the line to top management, now they depend on the CSP to do the reporting while they continue to see that production is proceeding. These line leaders may even feel some degree of relief that they personally “no longer have to call the top boss” to report an incident; yielding this “totally” to the CSP. Thus line safety accountability to report is allowed to slide over to the new CSP; and thereby the “trap is sprung!”

Usually no one in top management will recognize this shift, after all the new CSP can do it better, they observe. While this may have a measure of truth, the accountability shift took place the first time leaders allowed this “no longer have to call the ‘top boss’ if my group has an injury,” occurred. With the passage of time, the procedure to let the CSP become the sole reporter of incidences to the top becomes accepted routine. The subliminal reaction of the line leaders can be illustrated by continuing the above scenario.

*Let’s say a serious injury occurs. The line supervision calls the CSP immediately and s/he arrives on the scene shortly. Being trained to handle safety emergencies s/he does it well. As soon as s/he gets a free moment s/he places a phone call to the Owner/President/CEO and reports in some detail on the incident. Here we see the accountability issue and it is as follows: if ever the CSP report is allowed to supplant a parallel report by the responsible line manager to the same top management the “trap springs.” Line management safety accountability was sacrificed on the occasion that found the CSP making “the only report” to top management on an incident. (End of Scenario. NAC SWP 25 is published without the CSP Scenario; This NAC SWP 25A includes the scenario and is posted on the NAC website [www.naocon.com](http://www.naocon.com) along with SWP 25.)*

The zero injury outcome cultures have revealed the proper approach to “Who is in charge of safety?” Simply put, the safety function is to be in charge of safety administration while the line management leaders are to be in charge of safety execution. Taking the time to define the roles accordingly, including role definition to where the crafts also have specific knowledge of their job safety roles, is essential for a smoothly operating zero injury safety culture.

Another need is to always maintain “line accountability” for safety incident reporting with line managers and supervisors. The rule is they “must always” make a report, up the line; even to the point of reporting of near misses. In a zero injury culture the Construction Industry Institute research shows that where zero injury exists safe work execution is led and managed by the foremen, superintendents and line managers ending at the top of the organizational supervisory ladder. In the case of a serious injury the Safety Professional’s (CSP) assistance is properly focused on the care of the injured, the investigation of the incident, matters of safety regulatory compliance, safety standards of practice, safety education, training, coaching, and safety mentoring, along with

inspecting and auditing. The CSP is accountable for safety support; line leaders are accountable to supervise an injury free outcome.

Having said the above it must also be clear to all that the able members of the safety profession are critical to implementation of the zero injury best practices that allows the elimination of workplace injury for extended numbers of hours worked. Records of a million hours or more without an OSHA Recordable are now commonplace.

In many ways and many places the safety professionals are the movers and shakers that keep line management's "safety nose" to the grindstone. The safety professionals urge, coach, chastise, plead, beg, reason, inspect, audit, challenge, train, educate, teach; yet as we willingly load all this on their able backs we fail to "properly" engage, thus utilize their hard gotten expertise. We sometimes over-engage them by delegating to them important roles of line management in safety accountability

Bottom line: Ensure line leaders are responsible to execute all work free of an incident. Should an incident occur in a zero injury culture they hold primary accountability to report these events of failure to the top leader echelons of the company. Through such reporting "responsibility," the line manager "feels" the proper amount of "accountability" for supervising an incident free workplace.

A line manager expected to conduct work injury/incident free, least of all things, will want to be calling the top company leaders to inform them of her/his failure. Such a failure aversion model assures line leaders use all due diligence to apply the full complement of CII zero injury research technology to ensure the elimination of unwanted safety incidences; so the dreaded calls to report failure to the top leader are avoided.

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Chair NAC, Safety Committee

#### NAC Safety White Papers

Through its Position White Papers on Safety, the National Academy of Construction is recommending that American businesses investigate the research of the Construction Industry Institute (CII) into how increasing numbers of employers are able to achieve a million work hours and more without an OSHA Recordable injury. The nine research-based CII Zero Injury safety leadership categories are: 1. Demonstrated management safety commitment; 2. Staffing for Safety; 3. Safe Work Planning, pre-project and pre-task; 4. Safety Education; orientation and specialized training; 5. Employee Involvement, behavior safety and safety perception surveys; 6. Evaluation and Recognition of Safety Performance; 7. Contractor Selection and Management; 8. Accident/Incident Investigation Including Near Misses; 9. Drug and Alcohol Testing.

#### The ROI of Zero Injury Safety Performance

The Construction Industry Institute research has proved that the cost of successfully implementing the nine CII zero injury categories is returned at a rate of 400 to 500% per annum when compared to the costs of OSHA/BLS injury rate average performance (4.70 TRIR in 2010) for the entire construction industry in the United States of America.

Information and details on the increasingly popular "Zero Injury Safety Leadership Concept" is available from the following: Construction Industry Institute, 3925 W. Braker Lane (R4500), Austin, TX 78759-5316, Ph (512) 232-3004, [www.construction-institute.org](http://www.construction-institute.org). See the NAC website at [www.naocon.org](http://www.naocon.org) for copies of the NAC Safety Whitepaper series.

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