

Health and Safety — It's Not a Game!

Employer-sponsored "safety-games" or "safety contests" may seem benign on the surface, but there's a deadly motive to be seen when we look a little deeper.

Not satisfied with record profits, many U.S. companies are going after an even fatter "bottom line" by attacking health and safety.

First, there's the attack on the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. But, more insidious and immediately dangerous, employers are rediscovering an old scheme to con workers into **undermining their own job safety**.

"BINGO!"

In many union locals, there's been a resurgence of employer-sponsored "safety games" or "safety contests" which are **designed to "reward" employees for *not reporting accidents***.

In one union shop, management (without consulting with the union) announced a new safety game. Here's how it works.

Each month, the names of employees are put into a pool for a drawing, *but only if their department has not reported any accidents*. If your department has reported an accident, you're not eligible. The prize for the drawing is \$100. If more than three accidents are reported throughout the entire plant the drawing is not held. Instead, the money remains until the next month, so the "pot" can get larger.

WHAT'S WRONG HERE?

The union objected to this "game" precisely because it makes a *game* of safety. It pits workers against each other. Some workers will "blame" someone who gets hurt for ruining their chances to win the prize. The focus is switched from the removal of unsafe working conditions to *not reporting* accidents. It places the blame on workers, as if workers have accidents on purpose.

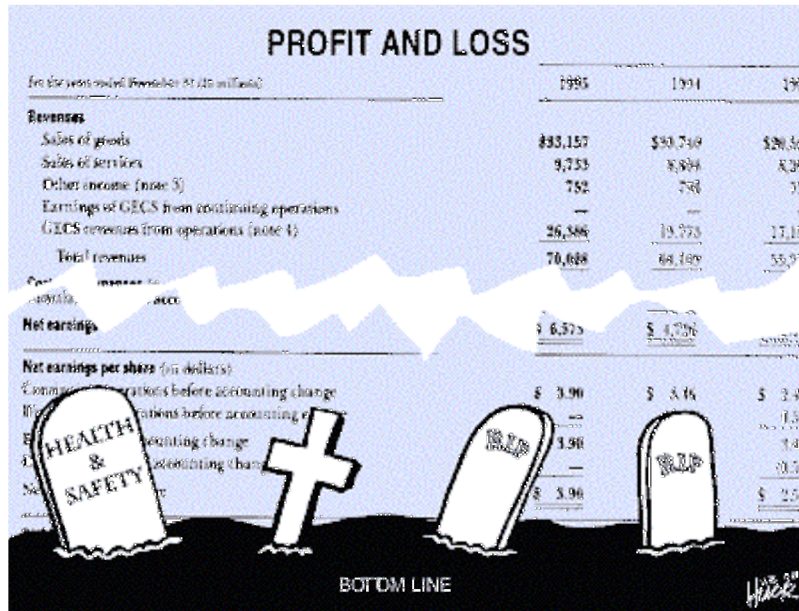
There are other variations on this game. "Safety Bingo" turns up every once in a while. Workers are all given bingo cards and there is a prize. Numbers are only drawn each week that there's no accident. In the word versions of this game, management will post the names of workers who had accidents and thereby "ruined" everybody's chance to play bingo that week.

HARD TO STOP

The worst aspect of these "games" is that they can easily turn into a divisive issue, especially when the union tries to put a stop to them. Common sense is overwhelmed by the game itself ... and members can become angry that the union (i.e. their co-workers) are "spoiling their chance to win." The best approach is to try to make people see reason - that these "safety games" are nothing more than daredevil stunts that, for example, we'd never let our teenage sons and daughters participate in. Of course, this is not to mention that there's nothing a boss likes to see more than a divided union membership.

Stewards must quickly oppose these games by explaining why they are just plain bad. They undermine safety and unity by pitting workers who have had an accident against other workers. We can't afford to let the boss make a game out of safety.

Safety at Work ...



... It's Not a Game