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2008 NEPPA Safety & Operations Conference held in June

Safety Leadership: Whose job is it?

Lack of communication is fertilizer for confusion.

Danny Raines

The 2008 NEPPA Safety & Operations Conference was held in early June and was well attended by NEPPA members from around New England. Participants were able to visit with a variety of exhibitors during the annual trade show, and spend quality time with their colleagues during roundtable discussions, meals and social hours.

While all of these activities were beneficial to participants, "they were secondary to the important message of 'Safety Leadership' which was the theme of this year's conference," said NEPPA Executive Director Pat Hyland.

On the first morning of the conference, keynote speaker Danny Raines delivered an outstanding presentation on the responsibilities of "Safety Leaders," and the expectations that come with these responsibilities. Drawing on his 40 years of experience in utility linework, Raines made it clear that safety leadership is the responsibility of every person who works on a line crew or a field team. It

is not a "management" or "supervisory" duty, but the personal obligation of every single employee to be accountable for the safety of others. He reminded attendees that failure to correct unsafe behaviors in others is all that is necessary for accidents to occur, and that "silence is consent" when people fail to speak out.

Raines also focused on the most common cause of all utility accidents, based on his life experience and lessons drawn from around the country: the failure to clearly communicate information, plans and intentions to fellow workers. He cited a number of accidents that he had investigated in which experienced utility

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Executive Director's Report

Are you ready for the "Smart Grid?"



by Patrick Hyland

We have all heard that the "smart grid" is coming to change the electric utility industry. But do we all know what the term really means, and – more importantly – what it means for public power systems? According to Wikipedia, Smart Grid is a transformed electricity transmission and distribution network or "grid" that uses robust two-way communications, advanced sensors, and distributed computers to improve the efficiency, reliability and safety of power delivery and use. Smart Grid is called several other things, including "Smart Power Grid," "Smart Electric Grid," "Intelligrid," "FutureGrid," etc. Deploying the Smart Grid became the policy of the United States with passage of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (Title 13).

The term "smart grid" may best be defined as bringing the power of communications and modern computing to the grid itself to upgrade the current electric power grid so that it can operate more efficiently, reliably and safely. Such

an upgrade is equivalent to bringing the power of the internet to the transmission, distribution and use of electricity - it will save consumers money and reduce CO2 emissions.

Public power possesses a unique competitive advantage as the power of modern communications transforms the utility industry. Because of their closeness to customers, and in many cases, condensed service areas, public power systems may be able to maximize use of the "smart" distribution system of the future. Careful planning and foresight of automated and other soon-to-be-available resources on the distribution system will go beyond remote meter reading and load control to energy efficiency and conservation measures like controlling circuits, coordinating distributed generation in service territories, and even energy storage.

At the upcoming NEPPA Annual Conference in August, Steve Collier of Milsoft Utility Solutions will examine the

Continued page 8

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The Northeast Public Power Association is an organization representing and serving consumer-owned electric utilities in New England.

Safety leadership

continued from page 1

Exhibitors show their wares at New England's premier electric utility trade show and information exchange. Public power operating personnel from throughout the region joined together to share ideas and experiences, and to view the very latest in utility equipment and technology.

lineworkers began to work on jobs without conducting basic job briefings, and thus did not have essential information with which to perform the work in a safe and professional manner. He also left participants with a memorable quotation from one of his former supervisors:

"Lack of communication is fertilizer for confusion."

On the second day of the conference, NEPPA staff trainers Wyn Braun and Bob Henriksen continued the theme of safety leadership during their presentations, underscoring the important roles played by management and crew leaders in building and sustaining a culture of safety.

NEPPA Training Director Rockie Blunt also addressed this issue, describing how safety cultures are built both from the top down and from the bottom up, and require employees at every level of an organization to commit to safe work places and work habits.

"For those NEPPA members who were able to participate in this year's conference, the message of safety leadership from these professionals was clear and compelling," said Hyland. "It is everyone's responsibility; it is a daily responsibility; and it is the most important responsibility that we will ever have."



Training and Education Update

APPRENTICE LINEWORKER SKILLS ASSESSMENT

RODEO



*Brenton Dimock
North Attleborough Electric*

Persistent rain and unseasonably cool temperatures did not deter apprentices at NEPPA's Lineworker Development Program from showing their stuff at the Skills Assessment Rodeo. The event, part of the Apprentice Lineworker Program, was held at the NEPPA Training Facility in Pascoag, R.I., on June 4 and 5, 2008.

The event is mandatory for all students and more than 60 apprentices competed in eight timed events which included Pole Top Rescue, Transformer and Cross-Arm Changeout.

Mike McManus from Hydron provided lunch during the two-day event for all participants, judges, and spectators.



Training and Education Update

No, the customer is not always right



By Rockie Blunt,
Director of Training and
Education

You will soon hear about NEPPA's newest training offering, "Customer Service Leadership," a six-session certificate program I will be conducting beginning in September. In the next few weeks, you will receive a detailed brochure about the program, but I wanted to devote this month's column to a short discussion of one aspect of customer service: dealing with difficult people.

Everyone is familiar with this truism of doing business: "The customer is always right." In today's competitive economic environment, in fact, serving the customer has been replaced by satisfying or delighting the customer. With all due respect to current trends and buzzwords, however, I take exception to that sentiment. To me, the more appropriate saying is "The customer is always the customer" - nothing more, nothing less.

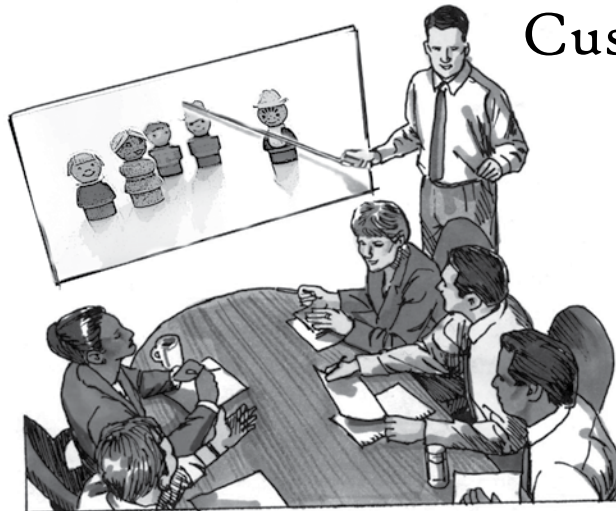
Don't get me wrong; the first priority of any organization should be to address the interests of its clients, both internal and external. But that's different from allowing people to treat an employee any way they want. How many of us have witnessed someone being rude to a bank teller,

impatient with a waitperson in a restaurant, or demanding to a sales clerk? No one has the right to do that. In my opinion, the bank teller, waitperson and sales clerk have every right to refuse to deal with offensive behavior.

And that goes for the public power employee as well. Anyone being verbally assaulted by a customer should maintain their composure and act politely, but they should also stand their ground. Rather than lashing out rudely at the other person, they can simply say, "There's no reason to be rude; we can resolve this professionally" or "Please show me the same respect I'm showing you." If the obnoxious behavior continues, the employee should end the transaction and inform his or her manager, who should come quickly to their defense.

All customers expect to be treated well (and they should be) but that expectation is not an excuse to mistreat anyone. Civility, patience and cooperation swing both ways - and that will be one of the messages in "Customer Service Leadership." I hope to see you in class.

Watch your mail for
details or go to
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Sexual harassment claims under the microscope



By Rick Dacri, Dacri & Associates, LLC

Rick Dacri is a management consultant, executive coach, and expert in human resources. Rick helps organizations improve individual and organizational performance. He connects with people in a positive and challenging way to offer practical solutions. Dacri & Associates is a NEPPA member and consults to many members. He can be reached at 800-892-9828, rick@dacri.com or www.dacri.com.

If you think because you have never had any complaints about sexual harassment that you are safe, think again. Without constant vigilance and a proactive plan in your organization, you could find yourself on the wrong side of a lawsuit.

I was recently engaged to serve as an expert witness in a sexual harassment case. The plaintiff's attorney wanted me to provide an opinion on employer best practices in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. In this situation, a female employee, after repeated warnings, was fired for poor performance. The evidence against her was solid. The termination was appropriate - maybe. The fired employee hired an attorney and sued the company claiming sexual harassment.

Here's where it gets ugly. The plaintiff's attorney put the company under a microscope. The attorney's goal was to show that the company was not properly protecting their employees and therefore must be complicit in the harassment. The attorney focused with laser precision on the alleged weaknesses of the company's sexual harassment program: how the company responded or failed to respond to complaints; supervisor's ineptness in addressing a brewing problem; and the inadequacies of the company's orientation program, its management training and employee education initiatives. By exploiting the company's vulnerabilities, the attorney attempted to demonstrate that the company was guilty and therefore should pay the employee a huge settlement.

The company was not without fault. The employee's supervisor was crude and made inappropriate comments. The

company's policies were outdated; their managers and supervisors had weak managerial skills. They did not have the proficiencies to recognize the volatility of this situation and therefore did nothing. Their training around harassment was merely passively viewing a video years before. Though the termination in this case may have been justified, it was done coldly, clinically. They mishandled it big time. The alleged victim left the company angry and she wanted to exact revenge. She hired a lawyer. This was a textbook case of what a company should not do.

Was the company guilty of harassment? That's what a jury will decide...and that may be the biggest offense of all. This case could have been prevented and the company could have saved tens of thousands of dollars, not to mention lost time preparing and fighting the claim, ugly publicity (yes, these claims hit the papers), and tarnished reputations. In sexual harassment claims, no one wins, except the attorneys.

So what can we learn from this claim? Organizations that have in place clear policies, train and educate their managers and employees, have consistent management practices that address discrimination and harassment issues, and nurture a respectful workplace culture, will find that discrimination and harassment claims become rare or never occur at all.

Continued next page

Get a copy of the Dacri & Associates booklet "Preventing Discrimination & Harassment Claims, a simple step-by-step guide for employers" by calling Rick at 800-892-9828. It is free to NEPPA members.

There are four key strategies to eliminate claims of discrimination and harassment:

- 1 Invest heavily in management training. Train all your managers annually in employment law basics, communication skills, and how to treat employees with respect.
- 2 Review all your human resource practices. Focus on hiring, orientation, promotion, discipline, layoffs/termination, performance appraisals and documentation.
- 3 Have a broad anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy. The courts and the EEOC interpret having no policy negatively. Include a complaint procedure, language discouraging inappropriate behavior, and language alerting employees that all employees should file claims promptly.
- 4 Follow your state law guidelines. Know your state laws to ensure compliance.



Harassment claims can be prevented. Take the steps necessary to ensure claims are not brought against you or your organization.

In addition to these broad strategies, incorporate these specific guidelines today:

- 1 Issue a written harassment policy annually to all employees and to all new employees at the time of hire.
- 2 Discuss your policy on harassment at each employee's orientation.
- 3 Take immediate and decisive action in response to any conduct of this type.
- 4 Establish a complaint procedure and inform all employees of it.
- 5 Investigate all complaints promptly, objectively and efficiently.
- 6 Encourage employees to report harassment to management before it becomes severe or persuasive.
- 7 Take appropriate disciplinary action.
- 8 Maintain confidentiality to the extent consistent with the investigation.
- 9 Protect anyone who brings a complaint and all witnesses from all forms of retaliation.
- 10 Train all managers and supervisors annually in sexual harassment procedures and inform supervisors of their responsibilities and potential liabilities. Include discussion on expected behavior in the workplace and where and how to file a complaint. Make sure supervisors understand what they can and must do and what they cannot do.
- 11 Keep a record of all training and who attended.
- 12 Educate all employees annually on sexual harassment procedures.

Chicopee Lineworker dies at age 55

Glen C. Harer of Chicopee, a long-time employee of the Chicopee Municipal Lighting Plant, died on Monday, June 16 at the Holyoke Medical Center.



Mr. Harer began his career at the utility in 1989 as a station operator. He became a 2nd Class Lineworker in 1990 and a 1st class lineworker in 1999. He was a member of the IBEW Local #455 and a union representative for the past several years.

"Glen was one of those guys that everyone liked," said General Manager Jeffrey R. Cady. "He was easy

going, optimistic and a trusted co-worker. The entire department is devastated that he is no longer with us. We will always remember Glen as a dear friend."

Mr. Harer was a member of the Chicopee Amvet Post 12 serving as Commander from 1993-1995. He was also a member of the Chicopee Knights of Columbus Post 69.

He leaves behind his loving wife of 28 years, Elba. He is also survived by a daughter, a granddaughter, two brothers, three sisters and many nieces and nephews.

Donations in his memory may be given to the American Cancer Society, 31 Capitol Drive, W. Springfield, MA 01089.

Are you ready for the "Smart Grid?"

Continued from page 2



potential for SmartGrid Technologies and how they can benefit utilities, customers, and communities. Collier is a widely known visionary, speaker and author on new and emerging energy, telecommunications and information technologies and their implications for businesses and their customers. He will challenge our imagination and thoughts on the explosion of new electronics, information and telecommunication technologies and what a few years ago would have been considered fantasy and science fiction.

Steve will be followed on the conference program by Terry Huval,

Director of Lafayette Utilities System of Louisiana, who is already adapting smart grid technologies to his own system. Like Steve, Terry believes that public power systems are uniquely suited to move to the smart grid, and he will be happy to tell us what LUS is doing to make this transformation.

NEPPA members attending the 2008 annual conference will leave with a better understanding of the "Smart Grid" thanks to Steve Collier and Terry Huval. We are delighted that they will be joining us to share their visions of the future, and to inspire us to join them in the great transformation underway.

*NEPPA 2008 Annual Conference
Mt. Washington Resort
Bretton Woods, NH
August 10-13*

Employment

For complete descriptions of the employment opportunities listed below, go to www.neppa.org and click on Employment on the navigation bar. Deadline for listings in the August News Line is **July 18**.

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Hudson Light and Power Department
Electrical Engineer

Ipswich Municipal Light Department
First Class Lineworker

Kennebunk Light and Power District
Electric Line Worker

South Norwalk Electric & Water
Meter Foreman

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Senior Engineer

Peabody Municipal Light Plant
First Class Lineworker/Troubleman
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and the main contact is David Brooks, Northeast Regional Sales Manager. He can be reached at (781) 329-4422.

World Energy Solutions, Inc

World Energy Solutions, Inc. of 446 Main St. Worcester, Mass. has joined NEPPA as an associate member. The main contact is Mark Mancino, vice president. He may be reached at (281) 681-2900 ext.206. World Energy Exchange is an award-winning online platform that is changing how wholesale and retail parties buy and sell electricity, natural gas, green power, and green credits.

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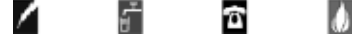
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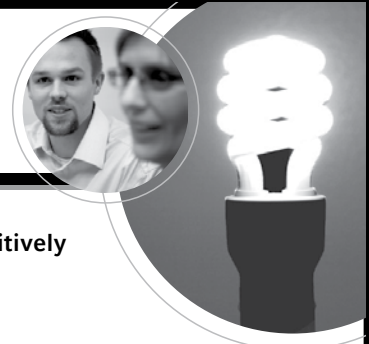
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NEPPA Calendar

July 7 – 8

Line-Worker Prequalification Program

NEPPA Training Facility in Pascoag, RI.

November 19 – 21

Public Utility Management Program

Durham, N.H.

August 10 – 13

Annual Conference

Mt. Washington Resort

Bretton Woods, N.H.

August 21

GF/Crew Leader Roundtable

TBA

September 23 – 25

Customer Service Leadership Program

Session 1

Various locations

October 3

Annual Membership Meeting

Chocksett Inn

Sterling, Mass.

October 21 – 23

Customer Service Leadership Program

Session 2

Various locations

October 28 – 30

Crew Leadership

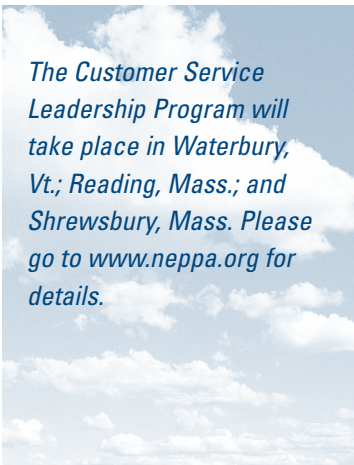
Stowe, Vt.

November 4 – 6

Customer Service Leadership Program

Session 3

Various locations



The Customer Service Leadership Program will take place in Waterbury, Vt.; Reading, Mass.; and Shrewsbury, Mass. Please go to www.neppa.org for details.