



The

# Risk Connection

Winter 2013

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The Risk Connection is a publication of Local Government Risk Management Services, Inc., a service organization of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia and the Georgia Municipal Association, whose purpose is to educate and inform cities and counties about loss control methods and risk management.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the ACCG or GMA, and further, are not intended to provide specific legal advice. Readers should seek legal advice on specific concerns from their own legal advisors. Any questions or comments should be directed to: *Dennis Watts, Editor, 315 West Ponce De Leon Avenue, Suite 356, Decatur, Georgia, 678.686.6284, dwatts@gmanet.com.*

## LGRMS: End of the Year

By Dennis Watts, LGRMS Training and Communication

In this issue of Risk Connection, we wrap up the year with several general interest articles.

One article from John Peters, Colquitt County, may be of interest as he discusses the counties use of GPS tracking devices in the county fleet. Many employees may think of these devices as a spying tool, and in fact they are used to make sure employees are where they are supposed to be, but they can also come to the defense of employees verifying that they were at a particular place and time. John gives the example of where a complaint was made that the county failed to pick up trash on a street when the GPS showed they had been there.

The LGRMS director, Dan Beck, has written a ten-step article to help you in evaluating your risk and overall safety. This is a good tool to reflect on where you have come from this past year, and to look at where you need to be headed in the coming year.

It is the goal of LGRMS to help our members promote employee safety and health, and help them negotiate the risks associated with liability issues affecting local governments. The staff at LGRMS hope we have met that goal for you and wish all of you safe and happy holidays.

## Colquitt County Implements GPS Monitoring of Departments

By John C. Peters, Sr., Safety Coordinator, Colquitt County

In March of 2012, Colquitt County decided that it would be beneficial for certain departments to place GPS (Global Positioning System) units on the department vehicles. In the beginning, the objective was to place the units on the solid waste collection trucks to evaluate the current routes and revise if needed. After discussion with other departments, it was decided that the Sheriff's Department would like to place GPS units on all of the road patrol cars and the Road and Bridge Department would like to place units on vans that contained inmates.

After discussion with these departments, it was decided that the GPS units should be tied to a web-based program that would allow the departments to access the information from handheld as well as desktop units. Other desirable features



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would be instant feedback as to where each unit was located, speed of each unit, a track back feature that would allow the supervisor to retrieve route information, and the duration of each stop.

After the bid process, we found that Advanced Tracking Technologies provided the information that we desired in the package format that was useful to the department supervisors. They provided the county with ten-second updates on positions and the ability to look back at daily reports for twelve months.

The ability to verify stops has assisted the departments in many ways. The Solid Waste Department has been able to verify that stops have been made in areas where the customer has claimed that their refuse can was missed and not picked up. The supervisor has been able to give the

exact time that the stop was made and that, if the refuse can had been placed by the road, the collection would have taken place.

The Sheriff's Department has been able to verify location of units when reports have come in that a deputy has not patrolled an area. The system has also provided valuable information as to where individual deputies are located during the evening and night shifts. This provides an extra layer of protection for the deputy.

Not only has the system from Advanced Tracking Technologies provided backup to our employees, but it appears that, from the data collected, the county will be able to redefine routes and see savings that will offset the cost of the system.

## Ten Steps to Planning Your Work and Working Your Plan

by Dan Beck, Director, LGRMS

Planning is a critical element of any successful safety process. The end of the year is a great time to assess your process and plan for the next year. I recommend ten steps to ensure a successful safety planning process.

### 1. Determine your organization's safety vision.

Many organizations will set result safety goals (i.e. workers' comp costs or injury rates), but most don't establish a vision of their safety future. Ultimately, if you have the correct process/culture, the results will come.

- a. Start by getting your leaders engaged in the process. If your leaders are part of the planning process, they will be more likely to participate in the implementation process. Leaders can be at all levels within your organizations. It could be an elected official, director, manager, a dept. supervisor, or a front-line employee.
- b. Ask your leaders, "Are you committed to providing a safety working environment and culture for the employees and citizens within your organization?" Then ask them, "What do you want your safety process or safety culture to look like in five or ten years?"

### 2. Assess your current safety programs/process.

Conduct an internal Culture Safety Assessment. Your LGRMS representative can provide a template assessment, or may be able to assist you with this process. Review all safety system elements, including leadership commitment, employee engagement, programs/policies, training,

incident investigation, audits/inspection, and emergency procedures.

### 3. Identify gaps between your current process and your vision.

Once you have completed your assessment, the process/culture gaps will be clear.

### 4. Prioritize gaps.

Most organizations don't have unlimited resources. In order to be successful, you will need to identify those issues that will have the biggest impact on improving your culture. Please keep in mind the amount of resources (time and money) for implementation and continued management. It is better to do one thing very well than to do four things that you don't have the resources to sustain success.

### 5. Conduct root cause analysis.

Ensure you are identifying the root cause of the issues or gap vs. trying to fix a symptom. Once you have identified the gap, continue to ask "why?" until you get to the root of the issue.

### 6. Develop your action plan.

Get your leadership team back together. Educate them the findings of your assessment and your prioritized list of gaps and issues. Get their feedback on your finding and make adjustments based on the group discussion. Select those issues you are going to attack. Brainstorm corrective action plans that address the root cause of these issues. Document the selected corrective actions, assign owners,

and dates of completion. Ownership should be distributed throughout the organization.

### 7. Communicate your safety vision and action plan.

Let everyone in your organization know your organization's safety vision and the plan you will all use to get there. Attempt to get their ownership in the process. Assign activities to all levels of the organization to ensure better ownership. There are several ways to communicate the plans: post on bulletin boards, discuss in meetings, send out via e-mail, etc.

## Checklist for Dealing with Workplace Power Interruptions

*from BLR Safety Essentials*

A power outage can amount to much more than just a brief inconvenience. It can create safety issues that workers may not recognize unless they have been told to expect them.

Consider these questions to identify and plan for possible hazards that can arise from power failures:

Are battery-powered flashlights and extra batteries available, especially to workers located in areas with no natural light source?

- ☐ Do workers have hardwired telephones (not cordless phones) or cell phones available for reporting emergencies – or reporting in?
- ☐ Do workers know how to manually open and close any electrically operated or secured doors and gates?
- ☐ If you have employees who rely on medical equipment, do they have battery backup available?
- ☐ If disabled workers are located on upper floors, do you have a system in place to help them get downstairs safely when the elevators are not working?
- ☐ Does your smoke alarm/emergency notification system have a battery backup?
- ☐ Is your battery-powered emergency lighting regularly inspected to ensure that it is in good working order?

Also consider what your workers know. Do they know to:

- ☐ Shut off any electrically powered equipment that was operating when the power went out?
- ☐ Turn off any heat-producing equipment to minimize fire hazards when the power returns?
- ☐ Stay clear of points of operation and other parts of machinery that could move or cycle unexpectedly when the power returns?

### 8. Review action plan status monthly and communicate status.

Within your safety committee or leadership meeting review the status of your plan.

### 9. Celebrate successes and investigate failures.

Recognize those individuals that have been successful implementing their action items, and investigate where implementation has failed.

### 10. Do it all over again at the end of the year.

- ☐ Treat traffic lights that are not working as four-way stops if they leave the facility?
- ☐ Bring equipment back online in stages after the power returns to avoid straining the system?

### Generator Safety

If you will use a generator for backup power:

- ☐ Have you notified your electrical utility that you will use a generator during power outages, as required by state law?
- ☐ If your generator is hardwired, was it installed by a trained, qualified electrician?
- ☐ If you will use a portable generator, have you taken precautions to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning? Have you addressed the issue of noise?
- ☐ Do workers know never to plug portable generators into an electrical outlet because of the possibility of dangerous feedback into the system?
- ☐ Is someone responsible for shutting down and locking out the main breaker while the generator is in operation?





## Public Entity Loss Perspective

by Natalie Sellers, South Georgia LGRMS Field Representative

I recently read an interesting article on the Safety National website by Dave Randall, “Major Loss Drivers for Public Entities,” a short yet interesting article discussing the problems faced by public entities in today’s struggling economy.

Our job as loss control representatives allows us to see firsthand how the economy is impacting our Georgia cities and counties. I have heard from city and county managers alike about the lack of funds for equipment, no wage or cost-of-living increase, and budget shortfalls when it comes to the needed work force.

All of the aforementioned economic factors coupled with comorbidity factors – such as an ever-growing population of obese and unhealthy, an increase of prescription drug abuse as well as narcotic use – together with escalating medical costs, are all guilty of weakening the workers’ compensation arena.

The impact of the economic downturn in this country is now clearly evident within the public sector. Everywhere we go in Georgia, cities and counties are asked to do more with less. Significant reductions in work force, in the form of layoffs and in not replacing those who retire, leaving behind exhausted workers, means doing the same job with fewer people. With the skilled baby boomers retiring, the result is a work force lacking the experience and knowledge of their predecessors. According to Randall, all of these factors can drive losses in a number of ways. In times such as these, cities and counties are forced to make choices that could ultimately make or break their already struggling budgets.

Another driving force behind city and county losses, Randall says, is Presumption Laws. There are forty-three States, Georgia included, that have Presumption Laws established for public safety officials. The courts have ruled that heart, lung, and sometimes cancer-related illnesses are presumed to be work-related, regardless of when the disease was contracted. The result is the employer paying the costs through worker’s compensation, paid time off, and a reduction in work force. According to Randall, these laws are major cost drivers for workman’s compensation; however, the full effect of these laws has yet to be considered.

What does this all mean, you ask? With the failing economy, the ever-changing health care laws, and the vanishing skilled labor market, local governments must begin discussing their own “loss drivers” and what effect these losses will have on their budgets. Randall postulates that, when budgets begin struggling, there are two major yet challenging tasks that governments fail to consider: loss control efforts and light duty or return-to-work policies.

The investment in an appropriate loss control program can help prevent claims from materializing, and therefore show an immediate return on the investment. The forgoing of loss control efforts can boomerang into increased claims on already deteriorating budgets. Because all cities and counties are not created equally, each entity must begin to examine their own loss from an analytical perspective and make data based decisions on exactly how loss control efforts can assist them to reduce worker’s compensation claims.

Randall also suggests a valuable asset in your worker’s compensation program is a suitable “light duty” or “return to work” program. Studies have shown that the humdrum light-duty jobs will expedite the employee’s willingness to get back to his/her own fulfilling job. However naïve the concept, the bottom line is that if there is no light-duty job, the claimant will remain off the job. This leaves an anemic and overworked crew awaiting their return, which can drive loss factors in two ways: resentment towards the system and more accidents on the job due to condensed workforce.

For a copy of the referenced article, go to [www.safetynational.com](http://www.safetynational.com). For assistance with analysis and loss control, contact your regional loss control representative. Loss control representative information can be found at [www.lgrms.com](http://www.lgrms.com).

## Conducting a Formal Exit Interview

*By John McIntyre, East Georgia Field Representative*

When an employee leaves our local government, whether resigning, terminated for cause, retires, or for whatever other reason, the individual responsible for the HR function of that government entity should always utilize a formal exit process.

Naturally, not all exits are amiable, but one should, in all cases, try to have some formal contact with that (ex) employee. When possible, a formal exit interview should be conducted on site by the HR representative to ensure that employee receives accurate information on COBRA, retirement withdrawals/options (if eligible), and paycheck information (how will employee receive that final check and what is included), and so the employee can ask any other information regarding benefits.

If that employee is not available to meet with the HR representative – the employee is sent home, HR is not notified until after the fact, etc. – then the HR representative needs to mail (certified) the appropriate information to that employee, including COBRA, retirement, and pay details. Additionally, someone must be responsible for collecting any local government property from that employee and verify that all property is collected and in proper working order. A standard checklist should be used to do this and must be returned to HR prior to that employee receiving the final paycheck. Most have the department head or director complete this process.

Once the final paycheck has been processed, meaning all is clear with that employee, a Georgia Department of Labor separation notice should be issued.

If available, a formal exit interview form should be used to ensure equality in what is asked of each exiting employee. This form is optional, but should be encouraged and can be used to assist the local government in possibly determining some departmental or local government issue – positive or negative.



## Inspiration to Keep Moving!

*by Sherea Robinson, Health Promotion Services, LGRMS*

The hot weather is quickly leaving, but that is no reason to stop your quest to keep moving!

Cold weather makes muscles tighter and less supple, which can leave them more susceptible to injury. A proper warm up and stretching routine is imperative. A good stretch will warm up your joints and tendons to help prevent tears and injuries.

Daily stretching helps you feel better, prevent injury, increase circulation and overall wellbeing. You never want to stretch muscles while they are still cold, so warm up before you even start stretching. You can warm up by marching or jogging in place for least five minutes. Five minutes a day will make a huge difference in how you feel and look. After you finish your workout, remember to get in another good stretch.

*Wishing You and Yours  
a Safe and Happy  
Holiday Season!*

*The Staff of LGRMS*



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# Training Classes

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