

The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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Building a Culture of Safety on the Job

Good wages, benefits and working conditions are hallmarks of the IBEW's strong contracts. But there's one condition more fundamental than anything else: ensuring that members return home healthy and unharmed every day.

as our industry has changed so dramatically," said Kim Greene, president and CEO of Atlanta-based Southern Company Gas. "Maintaining our safe operations is absolutely paramount. Having trained, skilled, confident workers is the key to that."

finally asked workers for their opinions, responses poured in.

"People care about safety. They had something to say, and boy did they say it," Greene said. "They let us know that we were paying way too much attention to the small stuff and were being distracted from the big stuff...that we were operating in many ways by being lucky, not necessarily by being smart."

Management realized that "we'd created a culture where people weren't reporting, a culture of being hard on people who tripped and fell, being hard on people who smashed their finger, being hard on people who got an insect bite and might have blown a period of time of no injuries for a work group," she said.

Partnering with the IBEW and safety experts, Southern Company Gas began concentrating on critical risks, the tasks most likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities. The result, along with the company's response, might surprise you.

"This year, the recordable incident rate is as high as it's been in 10 years," Greene said. "But I feel like our company is safer than ever. I don't think we're having more injuries, I think that people are telling us about it now."

Working with the IBEW, she said, "We're creating a learning environment where it is clear that we really care about keeping people safe."



Beyond the bargaining table, the IBEW is partnering with employers to build a true culture of safety.

"Our members do an excellent job looking out for each other and minimizing risks. But that's not enough," International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. "Employers have to be every bit as committed to job safety as we are."

With the IBEW's input and encouragement, they increasingly are.

"We've had the privilege to work side by side with our IBEW partners

Greene told the audience at the IBEW Membership Development Conference in Chicago in August how her company changed its approach to safety after consulting with workers.

For years, management focused on an OSHA metric known as the "recordable incident rate" that measures work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deciding the rate was too high, they cracked down on employees, demanding they "work smarter." The rate dropped, but something wasn't right. When the company



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email theSPARQ@ibew.org



New Jersey Members Devise New Safety Practice

For members of Cranbury, N.J., Local 94, safety is embedded into everything they do at PSEG, the state’s largest utility.

“It’s a way of doing business for us,” Business Manager Bud Thoman said. “It’s how we function.”

Roughly 3,600 members work in fossil and nuclear generation, as well as electrical and gas distribution. Within fossil generation, members at the Kearny Generating Station came up with a way to increase safety with a GoPro camera.

One of the jobs is to check for leaks, a task done in an incredibly loud and hot area. Rather than expose workers to these and other potential hazards, the members devised a way to use a GoPro camera instead. The camera captures a live feed and sends it to an operator outside, in a safe environment. And the camera’s mobility allows the operator to conduct a full set of checks without



having to enter the area.

“This has significantly improved the safety of those who perform this work and has reaffirmed staff’s continued focus on two of PSEG’s core commitments: safety and continuous improvement,” the Combined Cycle Journal wrote in its article on the practice.

The CCJ article also noted that the GoPros provide greater flexibility at a lower cost than stationary cameras.

PSEG workers have safety councils at every location, comprising management and Local 94 members, as well as councils that go up to the corporate level. They also hold safety meetings every morning. So it’s not

a surprise that they’ve also been given awards for their safety procedures.

“We’re constantly evaluating jobs and looking for ways of reducing injuries,” Thoman said. “It’s the standard we work by.”

SPARQ GOES LOCAL



IBEW 2019 RENEW/NextGen Conference

More than 500 young leaders attended last year’s IBEW RENEW/NextGen Conference and learned about the difference they can make every day in their workplaces and in their union when they commit to the IBEW Code of Excellence. RENEW and NextGen members are serious about their roles in building a strong IBEW—and demonstrating the core values of SPARQ is part of making that future a reality.

