

**Safety Steering Committee (SSC) Meeting  
October 23, 2008**

**Attendance**

<b>VACO Office of Administration (OA)</b>	√	Deno Verenes, Deputy Assistant Secretary  Cathy Biggs-Silvers, Staff Director  Laura Brown-Lucas, Staff Assistant, OA	<b>Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)</b>	√	Frank Denny, Director  √ Ruth Grubb, Program Analyst  √ Luann Jenkins, Program Analyst,  √ Ernise Benjamin, Management Assistant
<b>Veterans Canteen Service</b>	√	Michael Rabdau, VHA Washington Liaison Officer	<b>VA Austin Information Technology Center</b>		Rocco DiFronzo, Manager, Enterprise Applications
<b>Veterans Benefits Administration</b>		Leo Phelan, Director, Facilities, Access & Administration  John Buck, Facilities, Access & Administration  Beverly Young, Facilities, Access & Administration	<b>Veterans Health Administration</b>	√	John Beatty, Director, Safety & Technical Services  Marilyn Waggoner, CEOSH  Dr. Michael Hodgson, Chief Consultant, Occupational Health, Safety & Prevention Strategic Healthcare Group  Vernon Wilkes, Industrial Hygienist
<b>National Cemetery Administration</b>		Patrick Hallinan, Associate Director  √ John Thios, Safety/Occupational Health Program Manager	<b>Office of Information &amp; Technology</b>	√	Gary Shaffer, Director, IT Asset Management  Crystal Wiggins, Director, Employee/Labor Relations & HR Policy Development  Timothy Hughes, Program Analyst
<b>Labor Representation</b>	√	Ron Reynolds, AFGE National Safety Representative  √ Ronald Reynolds, NAGE National Safety Representative  Robert Redding, NFFE, Union President  LeRoy Bauer, SEIU, Divisional President  √ Cathy Billiter, UAN, National Safety Representative			
<b>VACO HR/Labor Management Relations (LMR)</b>	√	Larry Bennett, HR Specialist			
<b>Guests:</b> Willie Hensley, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary/Acting Assistant Secretary for HR&A  Francis Yebesi, Director, OSHA, Office of Federal Agency Programs					

**Introduction:**

Frank Denny, Director, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. Mr. Denny introduced Willie Hensley, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (HR&A) and Acting Assistant Secretary for HR&A. Mr. Hensley began the meeting by stating the following:

A summary of Mr. Hensley's comments:

- I want to thank Deno Verenes, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, for taking on a very important role of bringing us together on a frequent basis, so we can get our arms around workers' compensation (WC) issues and safety matters that probably drive the direction and the course that we see the department in within the WC arena. When I looked at the last report provided to me regarding WC, one of the things that we immediately identified was an increase in costs. One of the thoughts I had is that we should focus our attention on safety and begin to emphasis safety. It was good to hear and learn about the report card and efforts we are making to put in place a very solid and comprehensive safety program and to do so in a matter that will get us results in protecting our employees because prevention has to be a part of that as well.
- I want to commend the union officials who are also very serious about their work and about the tasks and charges before the committee. I want to thank the staff offices and Administrations for coming together and being a part of this as well. Because there is no way we can truly take care of our employees or veterans who come into the facilities day in and day out without the focus of making sure it is an environment that employees can work in and be happy about without the fear of being injured on the job. Whenever we have an opportunity to fix this and put programs in place, then we should take maximum advantage of it. That is why I believe the work of this group is so important!
- I also had a chance to look over the tentative agreement and agenda for the Safety Conference and Training, scheduled for January 26-30, 2009, in Las Vegas, Nevada, hosted by the AFGE National VA Council. Again, this is another monumental effort. I really have to applaud the group's efforts in working collectively to pull this agenda together, which again, will help us address safety and ensure our employees that we are concerned about the workplace environment, protective equipment, and safety in the workplace. This effort, that allows our employees to come to work and do their job in a manner that is safe, certainly informs them of management's commitment to safety and accident prevention.

I've had an opportunity to work with some of you from time to time. I recall many years ago when we started the WC Steering Committee and how we began to look at how to get our arms around some of the issues that have plagued the department concerning WC. We are making great progress, however; when we look at some of the increases we still have to realize our work is not yet done. I applaud this group for coming together, their dedication and commitment in figuring out how to get our arms around WC, how to make sure we are focused on safety issues in the workplace, and how we can work together as a team and in a collaborative partnership in order to move the Department toward becoming the best in Government.

I feel that we represent the best in industry practices when it comes to prevention of accidents and providing a safe workplace.

- We need to deal with the safety issues upfront and do it in a collaborative way. This sends a message to our leadership and employees that this is really something we have an interest in and are committed to. I'm delighted to be a part of this effort and was delighted too, along with Alma Lee, President, NVAC to sign an agreement on October 6, 2008, that focused on safety issues as it relates to our employees. I would like to see more of these types of collaborative initiatives put in place. This sends a powerful message to our employees that we are, in fact, concerned with their workplace environment and that we ensure that employees can come to work and don't feel that we turn our heads to issues such as safety, and infectious disease – things that we can certainly control with the right procedures and processes in place. Again, I want to thank the group!
- Our priority should be to let the employees know that we are doing things for them. It's great that we are focused on this in a collaborative way. There may be some disagreement but it will be process oriented on how we do things. I wish we could go 365 days with no injuries in the Department, but we have to realize the challenges associated with this when you have 272,000 employees. The bottom line is we should try to prevent downtime because this will not only save us money but protect our employees and their health and well being. Thank you very much!

Mr. Denny introduced, Francis Yebesi, Director, Office of Federal Agency Programs, OSHA. Mr. Yebesi has been with OSHA for 13 years and was a veteran of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

**Approval of SSC Meeting Minutes:** Mr. Denny asked the committee members if they agreed with the August 26, 2008, minutes. John Beatty, Director, Safety and Technical Services, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), made a motion to approve the minutes. Michael Rabdau, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS), Washington Liaison Officer, VHA, seconded the motion; the minutes are approved as written.

**Announcements:**

**Recognized VA Employees Field Federal Safety & Health Council's (FFSHC) –** Mr. Denny announced the recognition of five individuals for their work in safety within the VA (see attached). These individuals were recognized for chairing their local FFSHCs and received a monetary award or plaque for their efforts.

**AFGE National VA Council Safety Training, January 26-30, 2009 –** Ron Reynolds, National Safety Representative, AFGE, reported that everything is going good with the details of the conference and things are moving along smoothly. During the meeting, Ronald Reynolds, National Safety Representative, NAGE, inquired about management's support in sending employees to this safety training. Mr. Beatty stated that VHA will issue to the Network Directors and Directors an email or conduct a national call encouraging attendance for this conference.

**VA and AFGE-NVAC Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) –** A copy of the MOA (see attached) was provided to committee members prior to the meeting. Mr. Reynolds, AFGE, informed the committee that the MOA is finished. Mr. Beatty reported that the request for the Deputy Secretary's signature is in process to the Employee Education Service (EES) for this year.

- **October 21<sup>st</sup> Quarterly DASHO Conference Call –** Ruth Grubb, Program Analyst, Office of OSH, provided a summary of the October 21<sup>st</sup> DASHO Call. During the call there were 30 lines that were activated. The objective of the call was to discuss driver's safety and the use of seat belts. Scott Adams, VHA EES representative, provided an overview of the courses that were available in the Learning Management System (LMS) regarding driver's safety. Mr. Adams also conveyed to the participants on the call, information regarding the General Services Administration's Defensive Driver's Course. More information regarding this course can be found at: [http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA\\_BASIC&contentId=23298&noc=T](http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA_BASIC&contentId=23298&noc=T).

During the call, information was provided regarding the upcoming OSHA Federal Agency Training, scheduled for November 18-20, 2008, at the OSHA Training Institute (OTI), in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Information regarding this training can be found at: <http://vaww1.va.gov/vasafety/docs/FedWeekConferenceRegistrationInfo.doc>.

Ms. Grubb stated that the next quarterly DASHO call is scheduled for January 2009.

**Safety Educational Courses –** Mr. Denny stated that there are various safety educational courses online that can be taken. More information regarding these courses can be found at: <http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/Site/search/?query=safety>).

### Review and Discuss Assignments

- ▶ **VA Directive 7700, Occupational Safety and Health** – Ms. Grubb stated that a revised document was sent to the committee on September 17<sup>th</sup> requesting any comments/suggestions be provided to the OSH Office by October 10<sup>th</sup>. No comments or suggestions were received from the committee. The Office of General Counsel (OGC) had a few comments that they provided to the OSH Office and a few revisions were made to 7700, per OGC's comments. During the meeting, Mr. Reynolds, AFGE, requested that he review OGC's revisions once more before the directive goes back through the WebCIMS correspondence tracking system for each Administration's concurrence.

**Assignment:** Ms. Grubb will send the revised VA Directive 7700 document to the committee for review. Committee members should review and select "approve or disapprove" button for decision of sending document back through the WebCIMS process. Due by October 31<sup>st</sup>.

**OSHA Annual Report** – Mr. Denny stated that the OSHA Annual Report is due to OSHA by January 1, 2009. All comments are to be submitted to the OSH Office by Friday, November 28, 2008. Mr. Beatty inquired to Mr. Yebesi about his level of comfort with projections. Mr. Yebesi conveyed to the committee that he will review all projections again and get back with committee in regards to this.

During the meeting, Mr. Denny inquired about the OSHA interpretation response that was submitted to OSHA earlier this year. Mr. Yebesi informed the committee that he will have a response submitted to the OSH Office by the end of the calendar year. Mr. Denny stated that he would like each Administration to provide a written report if a fatality does indeed occur. If the Administrations have a service agreement then they would have a board of inquiry for any fatality that occurs. Mr. Beatty stated that he is concerned since VHA presently does not have a service agreement to cover this and will look into this issue more.

**Assignment:** OSH Office to provide VHA with the number of fatalities within VHA.

**Safety Strategic Plan** – Ms. Grubb reported that a report card was sent out which featured safety performance plan strategic measures. The instructions requested that each administration review the report card and provide the status of their targets. Some information on the status of certain items was gathered from the Steering Committee minutes and was provided on this report card. After each Administration reviews the report card and provides their status on their targets and goals, all data will be consolidated into one report card that will be submitted back to the committee for their focus on goals for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009. Mr. Denny also informed the committee to review OSHA's cultural development as well in relation to this.

**Assignment:** Committee to provide comments and feedback on the report card during the next SSC meeting in December.

## **II. New Business**

**2180 Poster** – Ms. Grubb reminded the committee that during the August 26<sup>th</sup> SSC meeting, Ms. Marilyn Waggoner, CEOSH, VHA, asked if we could update VA's OSHA Poster. VHA currently uses VA Form 2180, Mar. 1999 Version and a copy was provided to committee members prior to the meeting. VA's Forms Office has indicated the only form they have on file for use is the 15x18½, Jan. 1990 Edition. Committee members were provided a copy of OSHA's recommended poster (template) for federal agencies prior to today's meeting. If the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) or Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is displaying VA Form 2180, Mar. 1999, a sharing agreement is needed with VHA to ensure both Administrations is in agreement on who employees can contact for safety related concerns.

John Thios, Safety and Occupational Health Program Manager, NCA, reported that NCA uses the OSHA template. Ms. Raven Thompson, Office of Facilities, Access and Administration, VBA, reported that VBA uses both versions of the poster, FY 1990 and 1999 VHA versions. Ms. Grubb stated that whichever poster an Administration chooses to use, then it is the Administration's responsibility to ensure that the correct information is used as it pertains to their Administration.

**Safety Awards Question** – Ms. Grubb reported that a question was received from the field regarding whether employees should be monetarily awarded for not having any injuries or illnesses. Mr. Denny stated to the committee that he does not encourage this and feels that this would: 1) discourage employees from reporting injuries and illnesses; and 2) may put pressure on employees who might feel reluctant to report injuries or illnesses because this would prevent their organizations from achieving or receiving some type of reward. Mr. Ronald Reynolds, National Safety Representative, NAGE, reported that he agreed with Mr. Denny and stated that this would likely cause more discrepancies in the reporting factor. Mr. Denny said monetary awards should only be given if some type of new safety tool or process is developed by an individual or organization such as an educational DVD, etc.

## **III. General Discussion**

### **➤ Report by Administration:**

- ❖ **NCA** – Mr. Thios reported that NCA's focus is on prevention through site visits. NCA has had four visits during FY 2008 and plans to have more. Mr. Thios also reported that NCA will also focus on devising new processes. Currently, NCA has developed a machine that can dig four burial graves per hour.
- ❖ **VBA** – Ms. Thompson reported that VBA is currently working on the OSHA Annual Report and getting the appropriate format together to send to their regional offices.

- ❖ **VHA** – Mr. Beatty reported that some of the challenges with the OSHA Annual Report are the questions relating to the disaster response volunteers. Some volunteers involved with emergency response were not within VHA. VHA will continue to work on this issue. Mr. Beatty also reported that VHA, along with the Department of Health and Human Services, recently responded to three hurricanes and had three federal medical shelters. Five hundred and thirty-five volunteers also participated and were involved with the efforts. A hazard assessment tool was also developed by VHA.
- ❖ **VCS** – Mr. Rabdau reported that their HR office is currently gathering and putting together data for the OSHA annual report.
- ❖ **OI&T** – OI&T representative had nothing to report on behalf of OI&T.

**IV. Adjournment/Next Meeting**

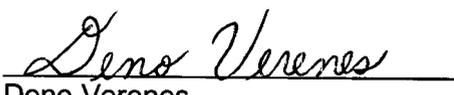
- Meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for December 9, 2008, at 9 a.m., in Conference Room 530.



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Frank Denny  
Director, Occupational Safety and Health



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Willie Hensley  
Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources  
and Administration



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Deno Verenes  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Administration