NSP Operational Leadership Curriculum

INTRODUCTION TO TRAINING

All organizations, including the National Park Service, have a safety program that includes policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and safety training. These are designed to help the organization provide their employees with a safe work environment by traditionally preventing or mitigating risk associated with threats or hazards in the workplace. Safety programs are a legal requirement and the right thing to do for our employees. Imagine the serious injury and fatality rates without our safety programs put in place over the past decades.

Sometimes our National Park Service culture appears to place job accomplishment ahead of employee safety. The National Park Service cares about our people and the important tasks we perform. NPS Operational Leadership introduces a new tool within our National Park Service Occupational Safety and Health Program – a tool designed to prevent or mitigate risk associated with human errors when we are faced with threats and hazards.

A Safety Management System, including but not limited to policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and safety programs generally provide a structure to manage risk. We operate in the field in a “fluid,” changing, environment. NPS Operational Leadership is another tool we can use to help us make better decisions in a changing environment.

NPS Operational Leadership is not a replacement for a safety program. It is a “special human factors tool” that is a part of the National Park Service Safety Management System. It is designed to complement your existing safety program. NPS Operational Leadership is about each individual becoming a leader within his or her own job description, taking responsibility for their own safety and the safety of the employees they supervise. NPS Operational Leadership is about teamwork and fostering a change in the National Park Service culture of how we look at risk, ourselves, our job, our team, and our organization.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The National Park Service is striving to deliver and maintain excellent leadership while maximizing safe mission success. Our goal is to provide a consistent and dependable work environment that enables all of our employees to reach their full potential. We know that our personnel constantly face challenges in the performance of their duties, and to meet these challenges, leaders must exercise competent leadership in their daily activities.

The NPS Operational Leadership training program is not designed to teach leadership but to reinforce the effective leadership characteristics you may need, and to remind you how important it is to practice these leadership characteristics in your individual and

team assignments. NPS Operational Leadership is to assist our people to better understand the role and responsibilities of every employee as it pertains to leadership.

ERROR & ACCIDENT CAUSATION

To better understand why errors occur we need to first look at the four basic types of errors that humans make. These are human error, simple negligence, gross negligence, and intentional rule violations. These behavioral categories are presented here because they are the principal labels we use socially and legally, to describe blameworthy conduct. Remember, error is defined as a deviation from accuracy or correctness so they all fit this definition. One or more of these behavioral categories will be applied in most accident investigations and the label often determines what steps we can take to manage them in the future. Following is a short description of each.

HUMAN ERROR: Human Error is a social label. It is generally agreed that the individual took an action other than the one they should have taken, and in the course of that action inadvertently caused or could have caused an undesirable outcome. Human error is a term that we use to describe an unintentional mistake or behavior – “I made an honest mistake”, “I wasn’t aware…”, “I didn’t understand…..”

SIMPLE NEGLIGENCE: Alternatively referred to as Negligent Conduct, this is more culpable than human error. In most cases simple negligence is defined as the failure to exercise the skill, care, and learning expected of a reasonably prudent person. It is the objective determination that a person should have been aware that they were taking an unjustifiable risk which could lead to an undesirable outcome. Simple negligence is the failure to recognize a risk that should have been recognized.

GROSS NEGLIGENCE: Alternatively referred to as Reckless Conduct and involves a higher degree of culpability than simple negligence. Gross negligence involves a conscious disregard of risk. Gross negligence differs from simple negligence in its intent. Gross negligence is a conscious disregard of a visible, significant risk. Accountability in gross negligence is critical. Since it involves a conscious disregard of risk, additional training is almost useless.

INTENTIONAL RULE VIOLATIONS Most rules, procedures, and duties will require or prohibit specific behavior. At one time or another we may have violated rules. Who among us has not exceeded the speed limit or taken a shortcut from required procedures? Is that an intentional rule violation? No, this definition of intentional rule violation pertains to individuals who resent being told what to do, either by other people or through rules and regulations. Their behavior is often contrary to their own better judgment. They do what they want, not what someone else wants. We sometimes call them “Anti-Authority.” This condition is not necessarily related to risk taking, but demonstrates that an individual knew of and intended to violate a rule, procedure, or duty in the course of performing a task because they did not want to be told what to do. Eliminating this behavior is of paramount importance.

MISSION ANALYSIS

Operational Risk Management is at its core a systematic process that assists individuals in making informed decisions. Almost everything we do in life is a mission. As employees of the National Park Service, we have the responsibility to fulfill the stewardship “mission” of the Agency. Our duties include a variety of jobs, tasks, and projects within several dozen career fields, from visitor use assistant and budget analyst to trails foreman and visitor protection ranger. Each of us must be able to analyze each job, task and project, assess their risks, mitigate those risks, and plan and act accordingly. NPS Operational Leadership Mission Analysis addresses and measures risk in a variety of ways. Risk assessment models such as the SPE and GAR have the capability to be used proactively.

STRESS & PERFORMANCE

Stress is anything that thrills us, worries us, prods us, scares us, or threatens us. Stress is the effect of a stimulus on the body. When we think of the word "stress", mental-emotional strain usually comes to mind. Anxiety, fear, anger, and frustration do indeed qualify as stress. Excessive levels of any of the following are also types of stress: sound, light, certain chemicals, fatigue, starvation, acute illness, pain, tissue injury (with or without pain), trauma, surgery, long airplane flights, heat, cold, and deviations from normal blood sugar levels. The common identifier that qualifies all the above as stress is the ability to activate the body's stress response.

In performing our operational tasks, we routinely deal with stress and have learned to use it to our advantage. Stress can improve performance, or it can just as easily degrade it. In exploring the relationship between stress and performance, it is important to first consider the effects of stress on the body. It does not matter if the stress is mental, emotional, physiological or environmental. The body responds the same way to stress; only the intensity of the response varies depending on whether the stress is chronic or acute.

Keep in mind that each of us has a baseline level of internal stress. This is the level of stress under which we live constantly and comes from such things as family pressures, work, finances, etc. The stressors change over time but they always contribute to our total level of stress. To determine an individual’s total level of stress, external stress factors are evaluated additionally. Both internal stresses, external stresses, and total cumulative stress affect our performance.

Many National Park Service operations do not go as planned. Our employees and teams are required to be alert and to quickly respond to the ever-changing and complex environment that may affect our work. Visitor & Resource Protection activities can include border security and urban law enforcement. As our facilities age or as new technologies present themselves, facility management employees need to be ever vigilant to threats ranging from deteriorating infrastructure to the mechanics of photovoltaic cells. Administrators face stressors that sometimes come unseen and

unpredicted resulting from deficits, deadlines, and regulations. As our natural and cultural resource base expands so do the challenges of inventorying and monitoring, encroachment, and climate change. Interpreters and Visitor Service activities can include the demands of new and diverse audiences far beyond the traditional boundaries of parks. Our stressors come large and small, concealed or apparent, from work and from home. How effectively the individual or team can respond to these situational demands often determines success and safety.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Situation awareness involves being aware of what is happening around you in order to understand how information, events, and your own actions will impact your goals and objectives, both now and in the near future. Lacking situational awareness or having inadequate situational awareness has been identified as one of the primary factors in accidents attributed to human error (e.g., Hartel, Smith, & Prince, 1991; Merket, Bergondy, & Cuevas-Mesa, 1997; Nullmeyer, Stella, Montijo, & Harden, 2005). Situational awarerness is especially important in the NPS where the information flow can be quite high and poor decisions may lead to serious consequences.

Simply put, situational awareness is: - A shorthand description for keeping track of what is going on around you in a complex, dynamic environment. - Knowing what is going on so you can decide a course of action. - Knowing and processing important information about your surroundings so you are not surprised by events. - Having access to the most current information. - Combining new knowledge with the existing knowledge in working memory in order to develop a complete and up-to-date picture of the current situation. This will also allow you to predict and react to future events that might affect the team. - The ability to maintain a constant, clear mental model of relevant information and threats.

Situational Awareness is affected by our experiences throughout our lives; how we have experienced the world plays a role in how we perceive the world. These four components affect our situational awareness in a given situation:

Experience & Training - Experience and realistic training builds a mental file that is stored in long-term memory. Poor training is often worse than no training at all because it gives us a false picture of reality.

Job Skills - The more we practice our job skills the more we develop habit patterns.

Team Management Skills - Teamwork allows us to share information and build a complete mental model.

Health & Attitude - Good health keeps our level of situational awareness high. A positive attitude leads to an open mind and lets us effectively process information.

DECISION MAKING

The types of decisions we make generally fall into three categories: Skill-Based, Rule-Based, and Knowledge-Based.

SKILL-BASED DECISIONS Skill-based decisions are carried out in routine, highly practiced tasks, in a largely automatic manner. Most of our repetitive job skills are examples of skill-based decisions. *KEY POINT: These are automatic with little to no thought. Works well when the skills we have match the task to be performed.

Example: Driving, walking, normal job tasks, etc.

Potential Problem: The forebrain is not in control, our decision program runs automatically. If the task changes we may not think about it and default to the wrong skill set.

RULE-BASED DECISIONS Rule-based decisions require a mix of conscious control and automatic control and are appropriate in familiar or trained-for problems. We tend to switch to this level when we notice a need to think about our actions and look for similar solutions that have worked, or look for an appropriate rule to follow. This is often referred to as: Recognition Primed Decision Making. I recognize the situation as familiar and default to the decision strategy I have used in the past that was successful. *KEY POINT: These are affected by training, memory, stress, attitudes, etc. We are required to think about the problem, evaluate it, and find an appropriate decision strategy based on a rule we have learned.

Example: “How do I cut this type tree, cross this stream safely, traverse this terrain safely in a UTV, etc.”

Potential Problem: Rule-based decisions are greatly affected by what has worked for us in the past. We may have developed bad habits and have developed an inappropriate rule or the situation may be slightly different and the rule we select may not work.

KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISIONS Knowledge-based decisions are made when neither a skill-based nor rule based strategy will work or is not appropriate to the situation. This strategy is used reluctantly when a creative approach is needed and requires conscious thought and a structured decision-making process. Knowledge-based decisions are examples of the analytical decision-making style at work. Remember, this requires considerable mental effort and the mind is reluctant to go there, it likes things simple. *KEY POINT: These are also affected by our training, memory, stress, attitudes, etc. We are required to think about the problem, evaluate it, and find an appropriate decision strategy even if we have never learned exactly what to do.

Example: “This situation is different than what I have encountered before, I need to stop and look at this situation carefully and think about the options and consequences.”

Potential Problem: More time consuming. Often referred to as: Analytical Decision Making. Takes more mental effort and we may be reluctant to do it.

COMMUNICATIONS & ASSERTIVENESS

Communication is the process of exchanging information. Information is conveyed as words, tone of voice, and body language. Studies have shown that words account for 7 percent of the information communicated. Vocal tone accounts for 55 percent and body language accounts for 38 percent. To be effective communicators, team members must be able to communicate effectively and understand the barriers to the communications process.