

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **Avoiding accidents at work**

The delivery of state money to Springfield is always good news, so I jumped at the invitation to join Commissioner Henry Swiniarski of the Department of Industrial Accidents last week when he presented a workplace safety grant. The grant delivers \$17,650 to the Springfield Joint Apprentice Training Committee (JATC) at IBEW Local 7.

The presentation by the DIA taught me some things about electrical work, and a chance encounter with OSHA at the end gave me a completely different lesson about workplace safety. Those items and the fact that it took place just before Labor Day make it the topic of today's Byline.

The Department of Industrial Accidents (DIA) is the state agency that oversees workplace safety and workers compensation, so of course that is the subject of the grant. The commissioner commented that Springfield had presented a top-notch application in order to earn one of only 30 grants throughout the state.

I have great respect for the electricians who work daily with "hot" wires. As a person who tries to turn off all the electricity in my house before replacing an outlet, I marvel at the way they can accomplish extensive wiring work without any obvious concern about the power in those wires. Their job does carry risks, and the training grant will help them reduce some of those risks.

The training grant will cover entry into confined spaces and work with asbestos, two risks that go well beyond the dangers inherent in their work. It will also deal with handling live electrical equipment. An added bonus is that the training provides part of the training required for license renewal.

Gary Courtney, JATC director, accepted the grant and commented that it would provide training for more than half of the union's members. He emphasized the importance of effective training for electrical workers, importance that is confirmed by statistics that show a higher death rate for electrical accidents than for other industrial accidents.

After spending time with the state officials and electricians, I walked to my car feeling well-briefed on workplace safety. But my morning's education was not yet finished. Two Springfield OSHA employees walked with me, representatives of the well-known federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Demonstrating that they are always on the job, they had noticed a crew working improperly on a nearby flat roof when they arrived at the grant presentation. They know (and I learned) that OSHA requires such a worksite to mark its boundaries with a flagged tape.

The OSHA officials called the situation in to their office and, by the time we emerged from our presentation, an OSHA car was on site and the flags were in place. Luckily no accident occurred, but an unhappy supervisor might now have a violation in the file. You know and I know that no carpenter was likely to fall from that roof, but the fall is much more likely when safety regulations are ignored. And a safety violation is less damaging than an accident report.

I took time off over Labor Day weekend knowing that electricians will be safer -- as are at least one group of carpenters. Even in the rain, I hope that all of you took advantage of that last long weekend of summer.