

## • Safety Focus Will Bring Change to MTA

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 9, 2001) "Everybody has a role in safety and everything should have a safety component," says Gary Spivack, MTA project manager for the new multi-year safety program.

That role will become increasingly clear to employees as safety training begins to penetrate from top to bottom of the organization.

The campaign began Oct. 1 with briefings for front-line rail operations managers and will continue with briefings for managers in bus operations and maintenance, construction, planning and administration.



Equipped for a safe day at work with safety helmet, vest and glasses is Thomas Salazar, a service attendant at Division 20.

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[MTA Introducing Multi-Year, Top-to-Bottom Safety Campaign](#)

Starting this week, safety officials will begin interviewing several hundred employees in all areas of the agency to develop a baseline of information about their knowledge of safety, about existing safety conditions in work areas and about the MTA's current safety practices.

"The idea is to develop a safety program for the entire operation," says Spivack, who expects to spend 40 percent of his time on the campaign. "It has to become a part of the culture for all of us."

### Schooling in safety

Under the five-year contract with the DuPont company, everyone from the CEO to the lowest-ranking employee will be schooled in safety management, identifying, reporting and correcting unsafe conditions.

The goal: reduce injuries and accidents by 50 percent over the next five years.

At present, MTA employees are claiming injuries at a rate of eight to 10 per day. The agency's 8,900 employees report about 3,000 injuries each year. Some \$59 million in workers compensation claims are expected this fiscal year.

In conjunction with the new safety campaign, employees will see a change in the way injury claims are handled, according to Lucille Van Der Heyden, Risk Management claims manager. The MTA is responding to complaints from some employees about how they were treated by outside claims administrators.

The MTA now will use its in-house staff to process injury claims and will hire an employee advocate who can intervene on an injured worker's behalf.

### A neutral party

"The employee advocate will be a neutral party who will work between

the employee and management to attempt to bring disputes to a reasonable conclusion," says Van Der Heyden.

The agency also plans to have an expert oversee workers compensation claims investigations and to work with division managers. "Some division managers didn't feel that their concerns were being acted on by the outside claims manager," she says.

Focusing attention on safety, correcting unsafe conditions, reducing the numbers of injuries and properly handling workers compensation claims all should result in a safer work place and reduced operating costs, officials believe.

"If we're able to get these costs down," says Chief Operating Officer Richard Brumbaugh, "the MTA will be one of the lowest-cost major metropolitan operators in the country. That's quite an accomplishment."

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