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Metro's new Employee Assistance Program counselors are, from left, Debbie Silveria, John Pyle, Hope Morrow and Steve Degelsmith. Back row, from left, are Metro program coordinator Carol Holben, Compsych representative Steve Danzy and Metro instructor Arnold Johnson Jr.



PHOTOS BY SHANTAY IOSIA

Emotional Events Can Leave Lasting Mark on Employees

- Employee Assistance Program Provides Counseling

By SHANTAY IOSIA

(Sept. 10, 2004) After almost a year, Oscar Estrada is still haunted by the memory of his first day as a train operator. It was the day a driver decided to challenge the Metro Blue Line and lost.

Although Estrada has returned to full duty, the grief occasionally surfaces as he remembers the accident. Recently, Estrada was required to relieve an operator who had been in a similar collision. Estrada completed the assignment but not without rousing dormant memories of his own experiences.

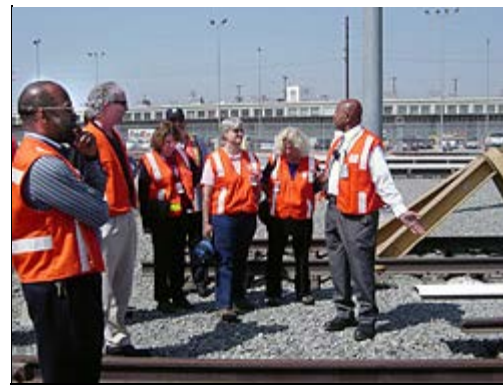
"I broke out in a cold sweat and started crying," says Estrada, a train operator since Sept. 2003. But he suppressed his emotions and managed to relieve the operator and return the train to the yard.

Hector Guerrero, Metro Blue Line rail division transportation manager, says accidents on the line are not uncommon.

"When there is an accident, everyone is affected," Guerrero says. "The other operators feel

for the operator involved and other people relive their own experiences."

Metro's goal is to ensure that the operators are given the best counseling and provisions in a timely manner, Guerrero says.



Instructor Arnold Johnson shows the EAP counselors the electricity-powered third rail, one of the more dangerous parts of the subway system.

Metro will be contracting with a new company for the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) beginning Oct. 1. In addition to providing guidance to employees facing life challenges, the EAP also provides psychological support for employees involved in fatal or serious accidents under the Traumatic Injury Program (TIP).



Johnson explains rail hazards and demonstrates proper procedures for handling a stationary train.

Counselors, Debbie Silveria, John Pyle, Hope Morrow, Steve Degelsmith and ComPsych representative Steve Danzy, completed their two-day training in August.

They learned the unique hazards the operators face daily. All of these counselors are contracted by ComPsych and specialize in critical incident debriefing.

Through TIP, the counselors will be notified at the time of an accident and will communicate

with the supervisor on duty to discuss the best form of assistance.

The counselors may report to the scene or may wait for a more appropriate time to contact the operator to provide support. The counselors will assist the operators until they are able to return to work or refer them to additional help if necessary.

Metro's Carol Holben, and Guerrero, coordinated the program with various managers and instructors to prepare the counselors for probable situations.

"They are trained to take precautions to prevent accidents, but the operators cannot help their outside environments and vehicles or pedestrians who choose to challenge the train," Guerrero says. "There is no way a 16-ton train can stop on a dime."