AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY PROFESSIONALS
Utah Chapter

January 2026 Newsletter

Message from the Executive Committee

Dear ASSP Utah Chapter Members,

As we begin a new year, winter conditions continue to present real risks across our jobsites, facilities, and roadways. Cold temperatures, ice, snow, reduced daylight, and weather related fatigue all increase the chance of injury if we let our guard down. Safety during winter is not about working faster or pushing through discomfort. It is about planning ahead, dressing appropriately, slowing down when conditions demand it, and looking out for one another. Simple actions like wearing proper footwear, maintaining clear walkways, allowing extra travel time, and taking breaks to warm up can prevent serious incidents.

We also want to reinforce the importance of speaking up. If conditions feel unsafe, pause the task and communicate. No deadline or production goal is worth an injury. Every one of us has the authority and responsibility to stop work when something does not look right.

Thank you for the professionalism, care, and attention you bring to safety every day. Let us start this year by setting the tone we want to carry forward: thoughtful decisions, shared accountability, and everyone going home safe.

Jim Christiano

MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Current Member Count

- 359

Welcome New Members!

- Lynnette Stock
- Debra Moore, CHST
- Jeremiah Hamilton
- Mallory Shea, CSP
- Jeremy Cumiford, CSP
- Kate Barry

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Winter Clothing Drive

December 5, 2025 - January 16, 2026
Learn More: Annual Winter Clothing Drive – ASSP Utah Chapter

February Chapter Event

February 19, 2026
5:30 PM
Oakland Construction Office
1978 S West Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84115
$10 per person

Kindly RSVP by February 16
RSVP: Annual Dinner and Silent Auction – ASSP Utah Chapter

Technical Article or Review

Making Safety Simple: Moving Beyond the Illusion of Control

By David Smith, Mentorship Program Chair for the Utah ASSP Chapter

For decades, safety professionals have relied on a familiar formula: writing procedures, training employees, enforcing rules, requiring PPE, and expecting compliance. These measures form the backbone of most safety programs, and in many cases, they do provide value. But as Wyatt Bradbury challenges us in Rethinking the Hierarchy of Controls, much of what we label as “controls” are actually assumptions—assumptions that people will behave flawlessly, that production pressures will not interfere, and that improvised systems will hold together just long enough to avoid disaster.

Bradbury reminds us that administrative controls and PPE only function when every condition is perfect. The worker must know the rule, remember it, believe in it, have the right PPE available, feel no pressure to cut corners, and execute the task without error. These are not true controls. They are expectations layered onto people already trying to do demanding work.

This is why Human and Organizational Performance expert Todd Conklin offers a powerful reminder: “Safety is not the absence of errors. Safety is the presence of defenses.”

Mistakes are inevitable. Our systems must be designed to absorb them without causing harm.

If we want meaningful progress in occupational safety, we must confront a fundamental truth: systems that rely on human perfection are unsafe by design. And if we want safety that is truly simple, we must design systems where safety is the natural, automatic outcome, not a heroic act of constant vigilance.

The Hidden Complexity of “Simple” Safety Programs

Many organizations respond to incidents by implementing additional rules, training, and reminders. The intent is good, but each new layer increases complexity and places even greater responsibility on frontline workers. In some workplaces, safety policies expand year after year, becoming increasingly difficult to follow and nearly impossible to apply consistently.

I will admit that I have been guilty of contributing to this cycle myself. With the best of intentions, we create more documents, establish more expectations, and implement additional administrative controls, believing we are strengthening the system. In reality, we may be complicating it to the point where it fails under real-world pressure. What appears to be a robust safety program can quickly devolve into a brittle collection of administrative controls that crumble the moment work conditions shift. True simplicity is not about reducing rules.

True simplicity is about creating systems that do not require workers to be perfect. To understand the difference, we can look at a real-world example where the illusion of control failed in a dramatic and entirely preventable way.

Case Study: When a Five-Cent Fix Could Have Prevented an Unfortunate Injury
At a food production facility, a worker suffered a partial fingertip amputation while troubleshooting a melon-dicing machine. The incident occurred during what had become a routine workaround: adjusting a malfunctioning sensor beneath the machine’s carriage whenever the equipment shut off unexpectedly.

The root cause of the incident traced back more than a year. A maintenance employee discovered that a screw securing one of the machine’s safety sensors had fallen out. Instead of replacing the screw, which cost only a few cents, the sensor was secured with a zip tie. While this allowed production to continue, it created a new problem. The zip-tied sensor frequently shifted out of alignment, causing the machine to stop mid-operation.

It is unlikely this decision was made out of carelessness or indifference to safety. More often, these types of workarounds emerge in environments where maintaining production, avoiding downtime, or “keeping things running” is implicitly rewarded. When small design flaws are treated as inconveniences rather than system vulnerabilities, employees may feel pressure to improvise solutions instead of stopping work to make proper repairs. I know this pattern well from my earlier farming days with my father, where duct tape often served as both the first and final step in our maintenance process.

Over time, operators were taught to reach beneath the moving carriage and reposition the sensor whenever the equipment shut down. This practice required workers to place their hands into the exact area the sensor was designed to protect. During one such adjustment, the machine unexpectedly cycled. The carriage moved forward, trapping the worker’s fingers against the backstop and amputating part of his fingertip.

No amount of training, procedures, or PPE could compensate for a system that had been fundamentally weakened by an improvised repair. The organization believed that the guarding and sensors were protecting workers. In reality, those controls had been bypassed for over a year, not maliciously, but as an unintended consequence of a workaround that seemed harmless.

This incident is a clear example of Bradbury’s illusion of control.

- A zip tie replaced engineering
- A workaround replaced design
- A human-dependent procedure replaced a passive safety system
- A five-cent screw could have prevented the injury entirely

Where Safety Actually Becomes Simple: Passive Controls

This event reinforces a powerful truth: safety must be built into the system, not layered onto the worker. When a sensor, guard, or interlock functions as intended, it reduces risk automatically. Workers do not need to remember special steps, interpret complex procedures, or navigate unsafe conditions under pressure.

Bradbury encourages us to prioritize passive controls, design elements that function the same way regardless of who is performing the work, how experienced they are, how tired they feel, or what production pressures exist. These controls sit above what

Bradbury describes as the transition of illusion because they do not depend on flawless human execution to provide protection.

This principle aligns directly with the NIOSH Hierarchy of Controls, which emphasizes that elimination, substitution, and engineering controls are inherently more reliable than administrative controls and PPE. By controlling hazards at the source or isolating workers from exposure, these controls reduce risk without relying on perfect behavior.

NIOSH Hierarchy of Controls

Examples of passive and engineered controls include fixed machine guarding or physical barriers that prevent access to hazardous energy or moving parts, interlocked access points that automatically disable equipment when guards are opened, and properly secured sensors or limit switches that stop equipment motion when a hazard zone is breached. Other examples extend into the built environment, such as permanent rooftop parapet walls that eliminate fall exposure, facility layouts that physically separate pedestrians from vehicles, and equipment designs that remove the need for manual adjustment near hazards.

In the case study, simplicity and safety were achievable through:

- Replacing the missing screw
- Securing the sensor assembly so it could not drift
- Eliminating the need for workers to place their hands near moving parts
- Removing the workaround entirely

Passive controls, however, are only effective if organizations are willing to protect and maintain them. That requires a culture where degraded controls, temporary fixes, and workarounds are treated as early warning signs, not signs of initiative. When employees feel supported in pausing unsafe work to correct system issues, passive controls remain intact and continue doing the work they were designed to do.
These were inexpensive, straightforward changes, yet they dramatically strengthened the system.

The safest systems are often not the most complex.

They are the most stable, predictable, and effortless to operate.

8 Ways to Make Safety Simpler Through Passive Controls

1. Eliminate or engineer out hazards instead of managing them with rules or PPE.
2. Design systems so protection is always present, not something workers must activate.
3. Remove tasks that require workers to “do it just right” to stay safe.
4. Fix workarounds by correcting the system design that created them.
5. Ensure equipment cannot operate in unsafe configurations.
6. Reduce production pressure by designing safety into the normal flow of work.
7. Standardize tools, equipment, and methods to create predictable systems.
8. Create conditions where workers feel safe reporting system weaknesses, degraded controls, and temporary fixes without fear of blame.

The Path Forward: Safer Organizations Through Simpler Systems

Our Utah ASSP Chapter includes safety professionals at every stage of their careers. Regardless of experience level, we all share the same responsibility: to build safety systems that do not rely on workers doing everything perfectly.

The case study above was not a failure of training or compliance.
It was a failure of design.
It was a failure of simplicity.

When we commit to thoughtful engineering improvements, eliminate workarounds instead of teaching them, and replace hope with intentional design, we move closer to the kind of safety Bradbury and Conklin describe, safety that is resilient, reliable, and refreshingly simple.

Simple safety is not less safety.
Simple safety is better safety.

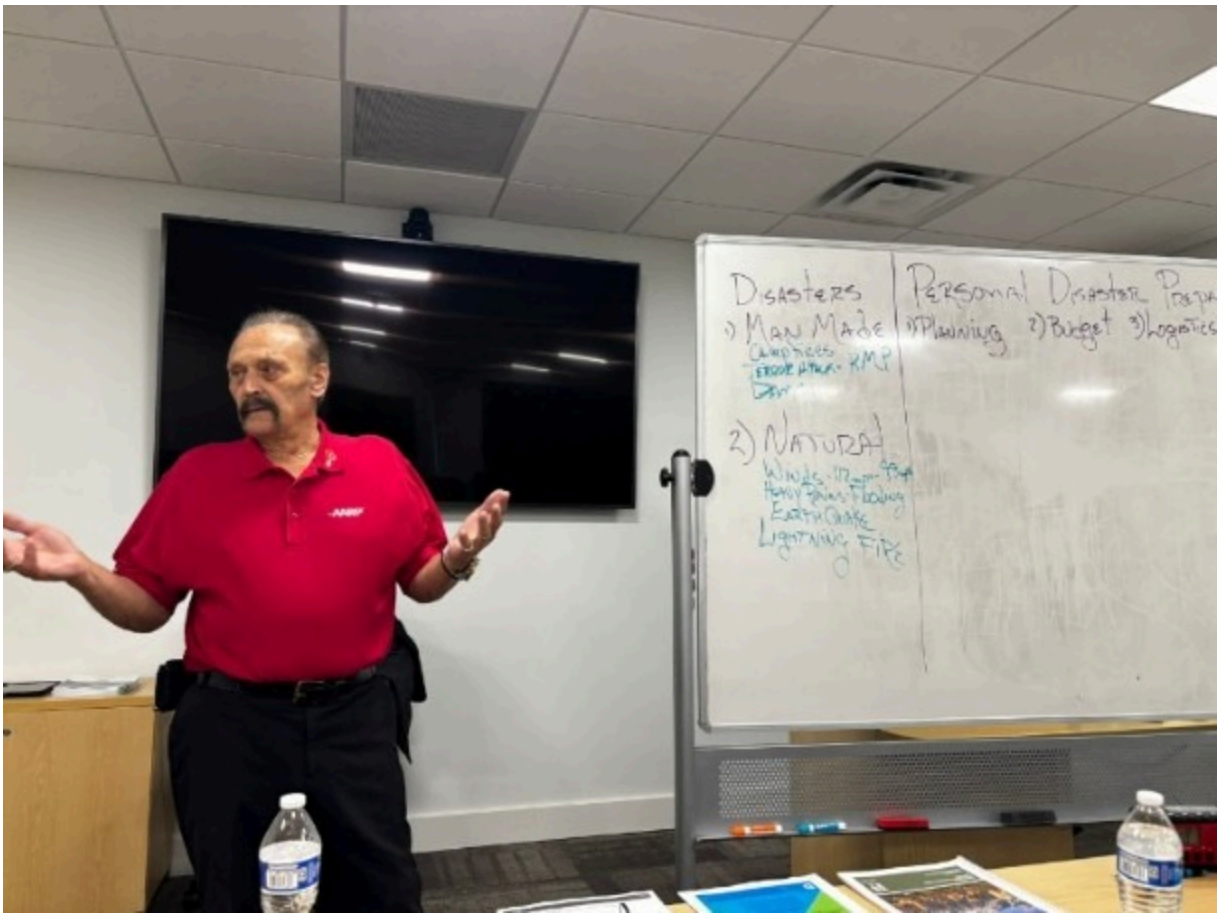
If we embrace this mindset across our organizations, we can create workplaces where safety is not a burden, but a built-in feature of how work gets done.
I encourage you to take a moment to read Wyatt Bradbury’s article, Rethinking the Hierarchy of Controls. It is a valuable reminder of the assumptions we often overlook in our own systems.

Wyatt Bradbury’s Rethinking the Hierarchy of Controls

Thank you for all you do to make your organizations safer.
Dave
https://www.linkedin.com/in/smithdavidj/

Our Last Meeting

Thank you to Lowell Finney for his researched and timely presentation on emergency preparedness. It was cool to see how we can apply the same process as the State Ops team or FEMA to our personal prepareness. Lowell used personal stories to emphasize the need to think through your readiness so you aren't "huddled around a candle" when the worst happens. Great job sir!



Would you like to Host a chapter meeting?

We are looking for companies willing to host a facility tour as part of our chapter meetings. Is your organization interested in taking part?

Contact jchristiano@divalsafety.com to discuss further.

Local Authors

Chris Johnson of Salt Lake City was published in the PSJ magazine. We've provided him with a $25 gift card to congratulate his achievement. Nice work, Chris!

Article: ADDRESSING COMPLACENCY BIAS in Film & Television Production

ASP/CSP Monthly Question

Which practice best helps prevent cold-related slips and falls on winter job sites?

A. Moving quickly across icy surfaces to minimize exposure time
B. Wearing smooth-soled boots to allow easier movement
C. Using slip-resistant footwear and keeping walkways cleared of ice and snow
D. Relying on handrails only when conditions become severe

Solution

Correct Answer: C

Explanation:

Cold weather increases the risk of slips and falls due to ice, snow, and reduced traction. Slip-resistant footwear combined with regular ice and snow removal from walking surfaces provides the most effective protection against winter-related fall hazards.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Our local chapter has scholarships available to members for advancing in the field of safety. This can be for a degree, the CSP exam, travel to an ASSP event, and more.

Please use our contact us form to request a scholarship: Contact Us – ASSP Utah Chapter.

National ASSP Foundation Scholarship

This year's winners of the ASSP Foundation Scholarship, funded by the ASSP Utah Chapter for $1000 are Thalia Garcia Gedeon, a master's degree student pursuing Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health at the University of Utah and Willow Snow, a bachelor's degree student pursuing Environmental and Occupational Health at Brigham Young University.

The application period for the ASSP Foundation scholarship program opens today, October 15, and runs through February 15, 2026. There is only one application needed for students to be considered for upwards of 100 different scholarships each year. We encourage you to promote the program to your chapter members and local EHS students.

The online application can be found here.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

We are always looking to network and find out if there are job openings. The jobs must be in an Environmental, Health, and Safety function. For example: Fleet Safety Manager, Director of Environmental, Health and Safety, Risk Manager, etc.

Please use our contact us form to submit an opening: Contact Us – ASSP Utah Chapter.

Visit the ASSP Utah Chapter Jobs Website Page

JOIN THE BOARD

Would you like to make a difference in your Utah ASSP Chapter?
We could use your help! Your board is made up entirely of volunteers who believe in the ASSP mission: to be a member-driven association that provides representation, promotion, and support for those engaged in the safety, health, and environmental professions as they work to protect people, property, and the environment.

Plus, we have a lot of fun doing it!

Please use our contact us form to inquire about joining the board: Contact Us – ASSP Utah Chapter.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

The ASSP Chapter Newsletter is published monthly. If you have comments or contributions that you would like included in the newsletter, please send to jchristiano@divalsafety.com. Contributions will need to be submitted by the 15th of each month to be included in the following month's newsletter.

Jim Christiano, SEE



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