

# VOLTS Newsletter

VALUING OUR LIVES THROUGH SAFETY

July 2020, Volume 80

Casey Draper, Facilitator

Amy White, Editor



## *I Have No One to Blame but Myself—Brian Coles*

Recently, I learned several valuable safety lessons that can prevent devastating damage to property or person. My wife and I packed up the RV, hooked up the boat, and went for a long-needed extended weekend getaway to fish, relax, and spend some time with the grandkids. The night before we were to head home, an all-night storm came in with heavy rain. The next morning we wanted to get the boat on the water, but the skies were black with lightning flashing and thunder banging all around. A few hours later there was a brief break in the storm, so we decided to pack up and head home.

Within a short time, most things were stowed or thrown in somewhere, and I started to hook up the boat—just as it began to rain again. I quickly fastened the coupler down, but realized that I'd left the lock in the truck. Since I always use a lock, I decided to leave out the little cotter pin hanging on the hitch so I could get the lock after I finished what I was doing—even though the thought came to my mind that I had better do it now. I ignored that thought and told my wife to get in the truck and test the lights while I verified that they were working.

As we headed down the winding road, my wife started picking up and putting some things away. One of the items she picked up was the coupler lock. She started to put it in the console but I said, "Don't put that in there or I'll forget to put it on. As soon as we get on a straight section, I'll pull over." At that point I had the thought, *You ought to put that in your hand or you may forget*, but I told her that it would be good enough to just lay it on the cup holder.

While driving slowly on the washboard road, several vehicles pulled up behind us, but nobody wanted to pass



us because of all the curves. I pulled over to let them pass—but forgot about the lock. We continued on and drove about 30 mph just enjoying the drive and talking to each other. At this point a truck started to pass us, but slowed down when it got to my window; the passenger began waving and pointing behind us. My first thought was that the boat trailer had a flat; but when I looked in the rearview mirror, I quickly blurted out to my wife, "The boat is gone!"

The unlocked and unpinned coupler had come off the ball because of the washboard road. As we rounded a bend in the road, the safety chains on the trailer weren't strong enough to keep it attached to the truck and broke—allowing the boat and trailer to go off the side of the road.

After the tow truck got there and was doing its job, my wife said, "I have to say something and don't want you to take it wrong. . . . I'm surprised how well you're handling this. Usually you'd be a lot more upset."

I looked at her and said, "I have no one to blame but myself. I got in a hurry, got distracted, and didn't do things in their proper sequence. This is my fault. I knew I should get the lock before doing anything else, but chose to wait and do it later. I could have even put in the hanging cotter pin, but chose not to. Multiple times I thought, *I pressed the coupler lock down and it clicked in. It'll be okay until we get to the end of the dirt road.*"

I'm lucky that no one was injured because I failed to follow the proper safety steps when hooking up my boat. There are no shortcuts where safety is concerned.

# Situational Awareness: See, Think, Know—Casey Draper

In recent months, the VOLTS Steering Committee has been participating in several web-based seminars where the Human Performance aspect of safety has been one of the main discussion points. Some of the discussions have focused on the science of *why* regarding human performance. Why do people continue to make simple mistakes that can develop into catastrophic results?

Everyone is familiar with the phrase “we are creatures of habit.” When that is said, two things are implied. First, we try to keep things predictable and return to the same pattern of behavior. Second, when we’re in our normal workspaces and doing routine tasks, we don’t stop to intentionally process the information that has been given. Instead, the brain operates at the subconscious

level and performs the task that it recognizes as habit. This is the way our brains are programmed to be more efficient. So how do we prevent our brains from going into autopilot? By improving the situational awareness of our decisions.

Think of all the factors that impact our awareness levels. Factors such as fatigue, the various distractions that are constantly around, and the fact that humans default to the use of habits to try to be more efficient. By improving our situational awareness (being aware of our surroundings), we can improve our decisions when they matter most. Take the time to **See** things more deeply and broadly, **Think** through your actions prior to taking action, and **Know** what the right action is and when to take it.

## VOLTS Data Report



*What's your why?*

June Report Summary	
VOLTS Contact Rate (Performance Incentive Goal is to Remain Above 1)	1.3
Observations Performed	493
Protected Work Behaviors Observed	5,486
Exposed Work Behaviors Observed	52

