



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

March 30, 2026



NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

2026

Grant Tinker, CFO, FO, CTO, MO
Battalion Chief
Colorado Springs Fire Department

CPC Commissioner



Credit: Colorado Springs Fire Department

DISCLAIMER NOTICE

You will be strongly encouraged to speak up if you see a problem... just know that speaking up does not guarantee anything will change.

Also, I am not perfect. In fact, some of the examples you'll see today are things I have 100% done myself. So if something sounds familiar, do not worry — I am calling myself out too.

I AM NOT PREACHING PERFECTION
I AM NOT PERFECT



How many times have you done this today?

- We know we shouldn't.
- Have we been lucky so far?

DONT TEXT
AND
DRIVE

- § 42-4-239 = Current law (texting-specific)
- Hands-Free Law (SB24-065) = New, broader law starting 2025 (all handheld use banned)

“The gradual process through which unacceptable practice or standards become acceptable. As the deviant behavior is repeated without catastrophic results, it becomes the social norm for the organization.”

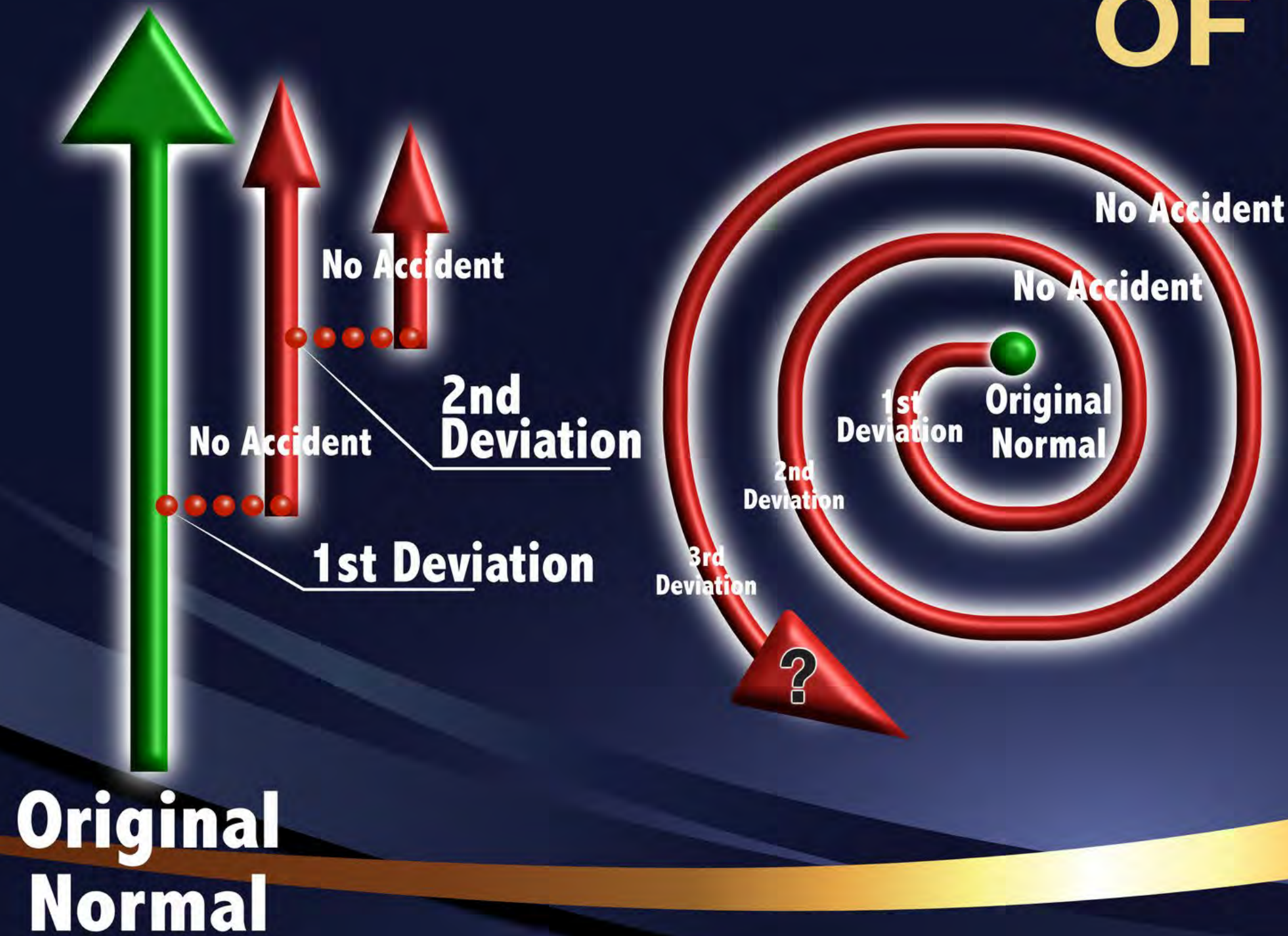
-Dr. Diane Vaughan



Credit: Colorado Springs Fire Department

NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

Occurs when expectations and tolerance for deviations decrease over time due to repeated exposure without immediate consequences.



Shifting Norms

- What was once deemed unacceptable may now be tolerated.

Shortcut Culture

- A tendency to take shortcuts becomes prevalent.

Common Justifications

- "This is the way we've always done it."
- "This is the  way."
- "Nothing bad has happened yet."
- "Saw that coming."

When individuals or teams perceive an inability to meet standards and resort to shortcuts.



Credit: Grant Tinker

Shortcut Reinforcement

- Shortcuts are taken without facing negative consequences.

Normalization of Shortcuts

- Repeated use of shortcuts leads to their normalization.

Anticipated Consequences

- The consequences become predictable and are no longer a surprise.
- This phenomenon can be referred to as a "**predictable surprise.**"



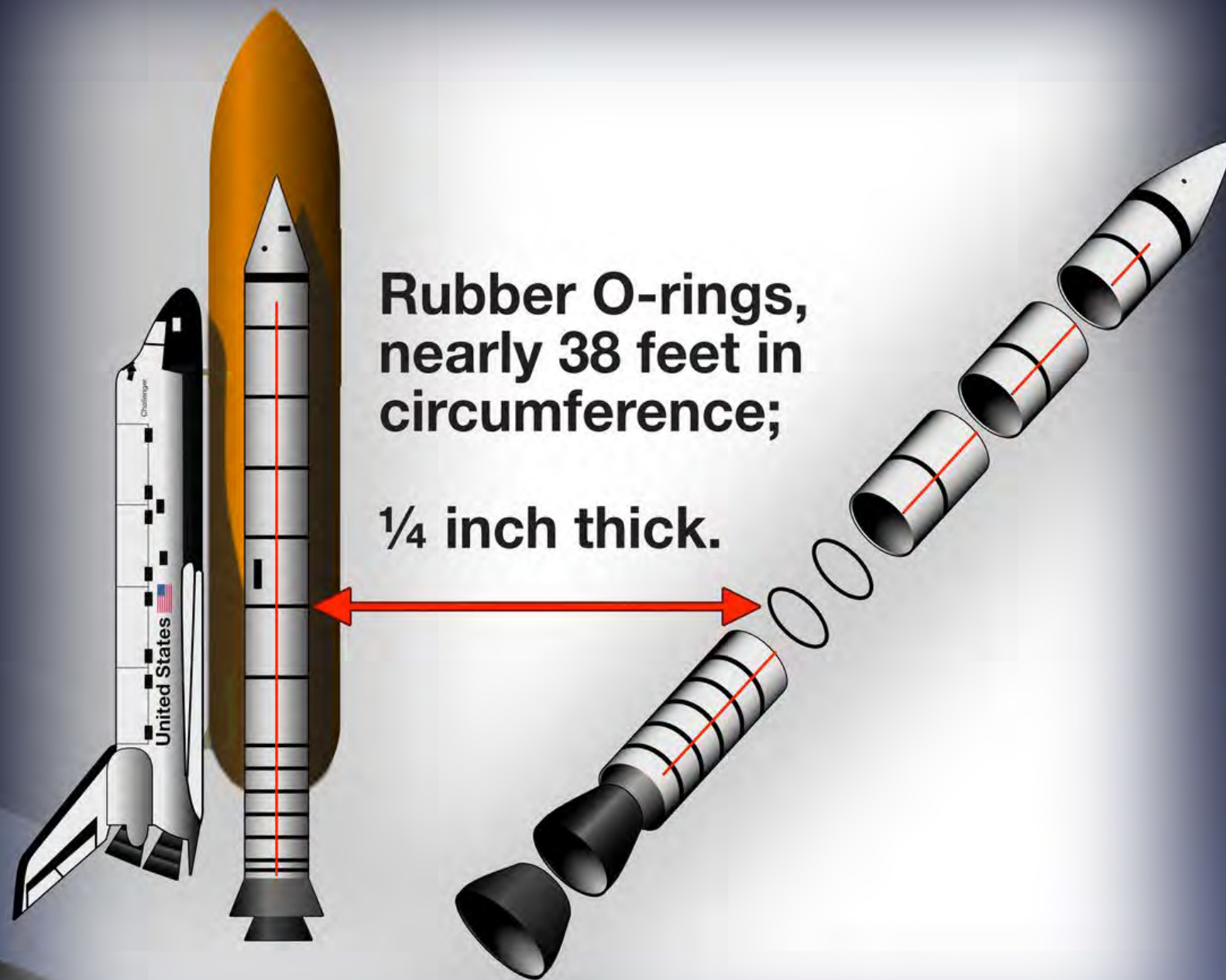
Challenger Space Shuttle Disaster

January 28, 1986

- Right solid rocket booster failure
- 73 seconds into launch.
- Was not technically an explosion, but a disintegration of the vehicle.



Challenger Space Shuttle Disaster



Rubber O-rings,
nearly 38 feet in
circumference;
1/4 inch thick.

- Assembled in sections with O-ring between them to prevent fire contact with the steel booster. O-ring damage led to vehicle breakup.
- O-ring observations: In 14 of 24 prior astronaut flights, NASA engineers noted O-rings in contact with fire during inspections.
- Challenger details: It was the 25th flight, and NASA aimed for 26 missions annually, facing pressure to meet standards, as promised to Congress.



Credit: NASA

Melted rubber O-ring from Challenger. (Credit: NASA)



Credit: Grant Tinker

NASA's Standards

- NASA classified O-ring impingement as a "Criticality 1 deviance," with the discovery triggering an immediate grounding of fleet.

Anticipated O-ring Damage

- The team grew accustomed to expecting O-ring damage.

Lowered Performance Standards

- The team rationalized accepting a lower standard of performance.

Predicable Surprise

- The catastrophe was not a surprise but a predictable one.

Titan Submersible June 18, 2023

• STILL UNDER INVESTIGATION

- Attempted depth of 12,500 feet.
- Catastrophic implosion.
- Experts raised flags on the construction.
- The hull was mostly Carbon Fiber.
- Carbon fiber weakens in compression.
- “The vast majority of marine (and aviation) accidents are a result of operator error, not mechanical failure.” –OceanGate CEO



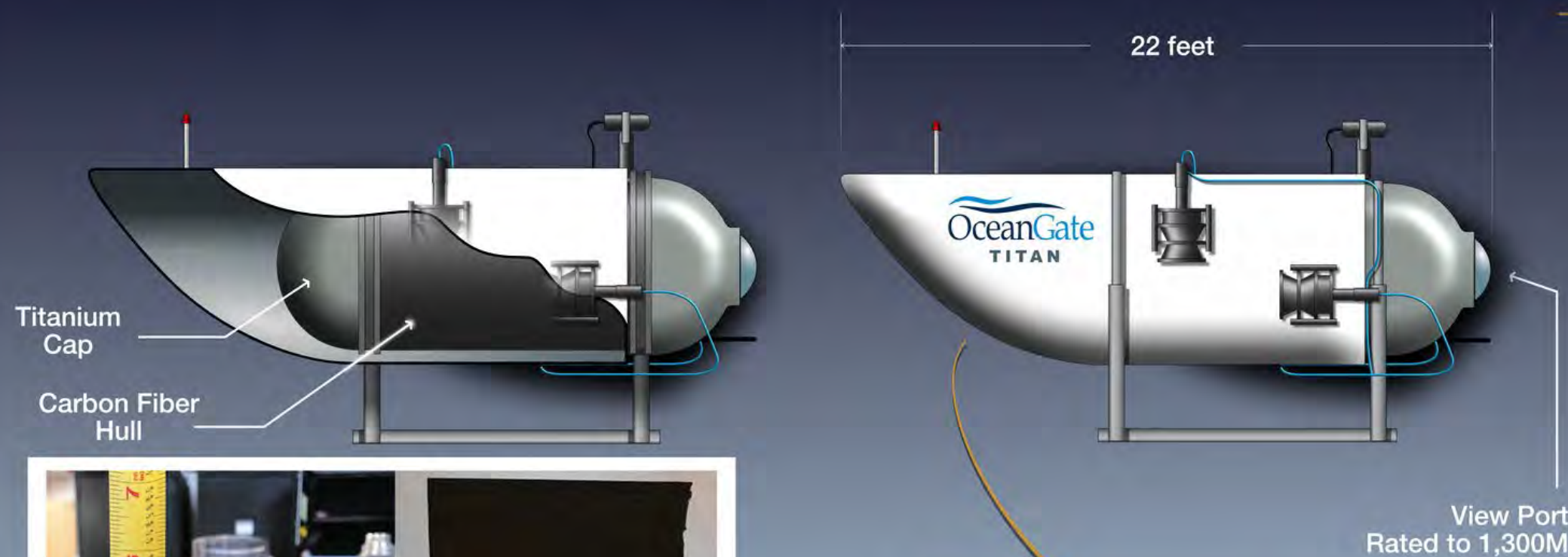
Source: U.S. Coast Guard Titan Submersible Marine Board of Investigation



NAVY

OceanGate

Titan Submersible Implosion



Credit: David Lochridge, Director of Operations, OceanGate (fmr)



Credit: Pelagic Research Services

- Deviated from classification and testing practices.
- Carbon fiber hull was coated in Rhino-lining, preventing inspection.
- For years, engineers and employees voiced concerns about safety.

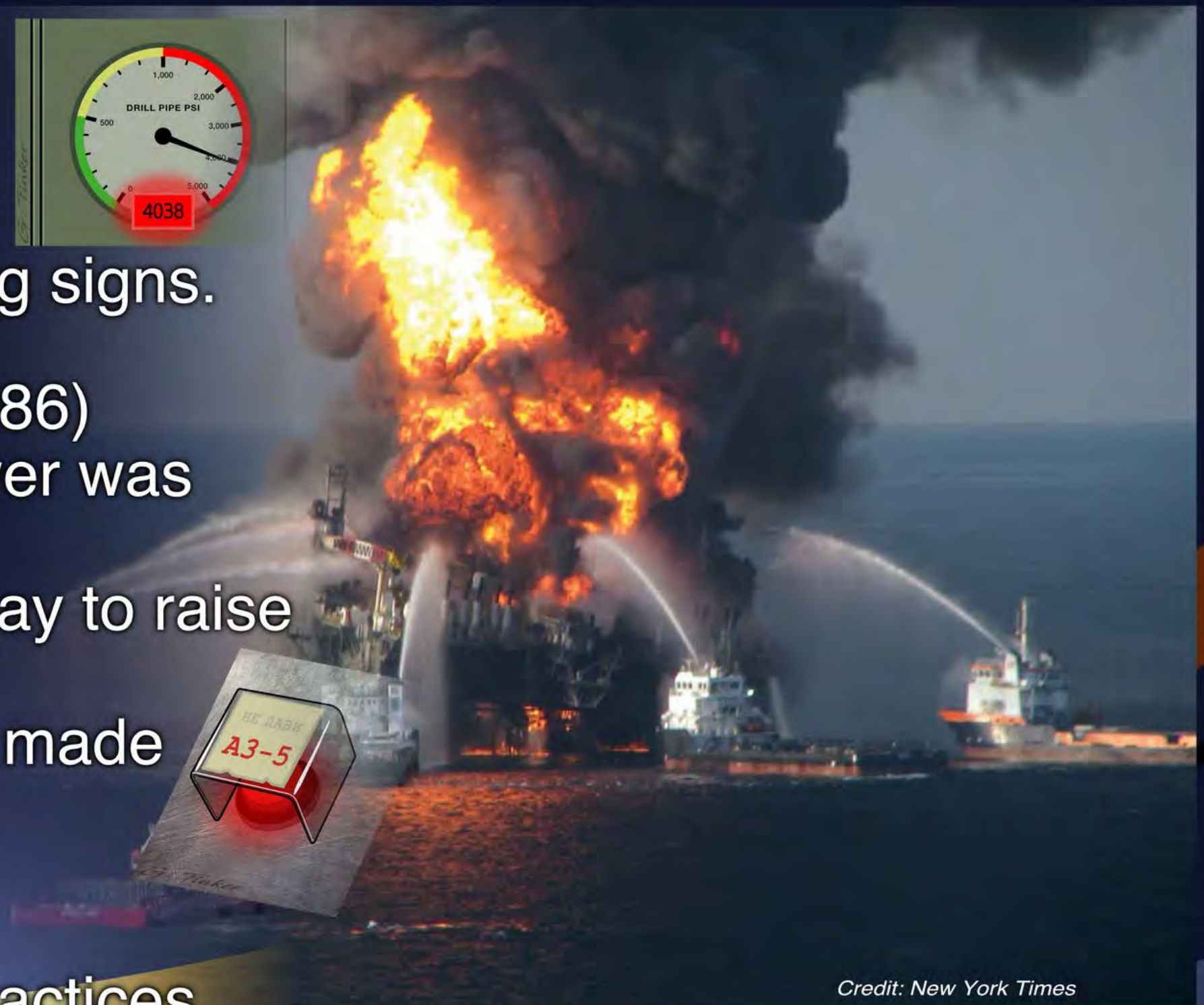
Source: U.S. Coast Guard Titan Submersible Marine Board of Investigation

Credit: Grant Tinker



Other Examples...

- Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2010).
 - BP took shortcuts and ignored warning signs.
- Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor Explosion (1986)
 - Performing a test on the reactor, power was lowered (but too far).
 - “Rules” were in place of the proper way to raise the power.
 - Rods meant to stop the reactor were made with graphite....cheaper.
- Boeing 737-Max Crashes (2018-2019)
 - Deviated from standardized safety practices and pilot training.



Credit: New York Times

SEAT BELTS MUST BE WORN
IN THIS VEHICLE AT ALL TIMES



BEEP!
BEEP!

MCAS

Boeing 737-Max Crashes (2018-2019)

Boeing 737-700, 800, 900ER 1993-2016

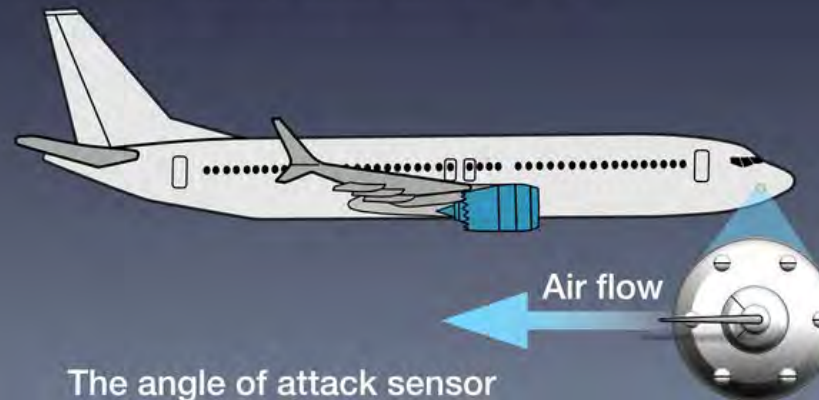
Boeing 737 Max 2017

Larger engine

Top view of wing

Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS)

Anti-stall feature introduced due to heavier and forward-sitting engines.



Larger engines sitting forward on the wings could push up the plane nose, risking a stall in certain conditions.



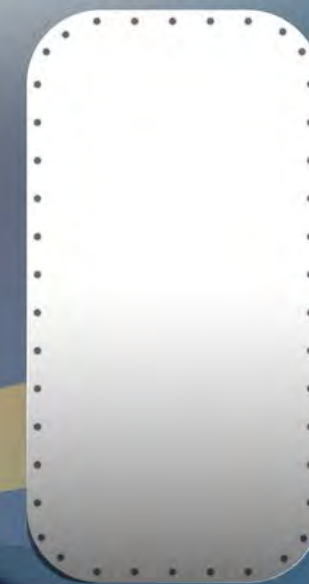
- Deviated from standardized safety practices and pilot training.
- McDonnell/Boeing merger & competition with Airbus caused pressure to manufacture faster.
- Boeing wanted to avoid all new pilot training in simulators, so they took a shortcut to roll the new system and new 737 MAX.
- MCAS update was in abbreviation section.

Alaska Airlines #1282

January 5, 2024



- Door Plug not properly secured
- Boeing directed to slow down production for better quality control



Seattle Crane Collapse

April 27, 2019

- Bolts were removed prematurely to speed up crane disassembly.
- Four civilian fatalities.



Application to the Fire Service

360°

- Improper Decon/cleaning gear
- Running crews of 3
- Handling critical calls (PTSD)
- **Accidental BOB activations**
- PASS device alert sound
- Poor documentation of medical calls
- **Trying to make response times**
- Ballistic vest usage
- Pencil whipping check off sheets

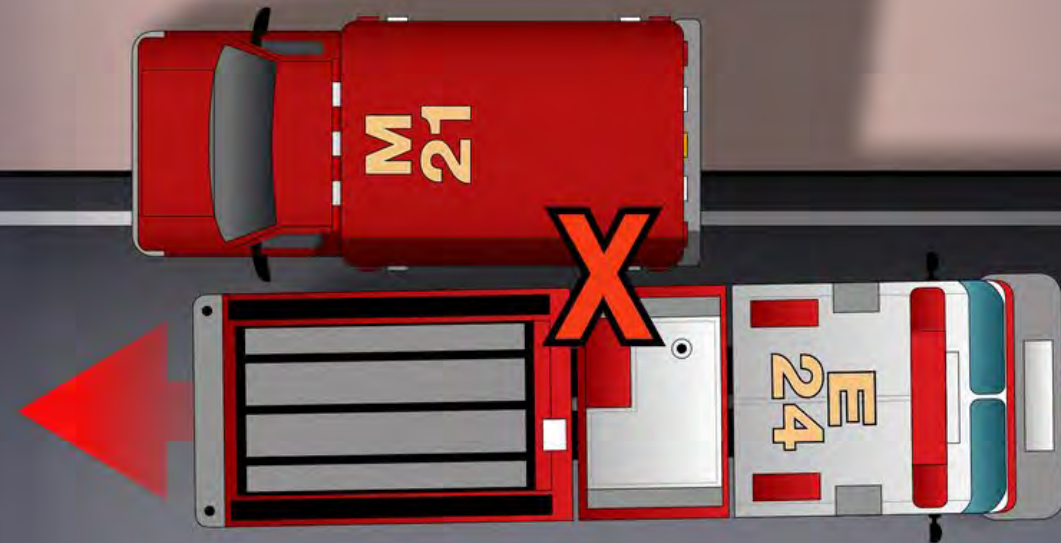
- Using a backer
- Seatbelts
- 360° on Automatic Alarms
- Not being on air during overhaul
- Speeds when responding emergent
- Not checking SCBA every morning
- No eye protection on medical calls
- Routine medication administration
- Clearing intersections
- "Footing" a ground ladder
- **Sounding the floor**

More examples?



Phoenix Firefighter Backed/Crushed Between Apparatus May 18, 2013

Firefighter Close Calls, July 24, 2013



- FF was outside of their ambulance donning firefighting gear for a mulch fire
- Engine was repositioning on road
- FF was crushed between ambulance and the fire engine

• Driver of the Engine stated:

"Nate (E24 FF) asked me if I wanted a backer. I said no, I got it."

PHOENIX REGIONAL
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SPOTTING FIRE DEPARTMENT APPARATUS
M.P. 205.08A 08/20-R Page 1 of 2

APPARATUS BACKING/FORWARD MOVEMENT - DRIVERS AND SPOTTERS
Backing of Fire Department apparatus should be avoided whenever possible. Where backing in unavoidable spotters shall be used. In addition, spotters shall be used when apparatus must negotiate forward turns with restrictive side clearances and where height clearances are uncertain.



Recruit Live-Fire Training Fatality February 9, 2007

- Live-fire in an acquired structure.
- 3-story, end unit row home.
- Building became vacant in 1999, condemned in 2004, scheduled to be demolished.

Team 1 - Bypass fire on 2, Fire Attack on 3
Team 2 - Fire Attack on 2
Team 3 - "Truck"



Date Released: December 8, 2008

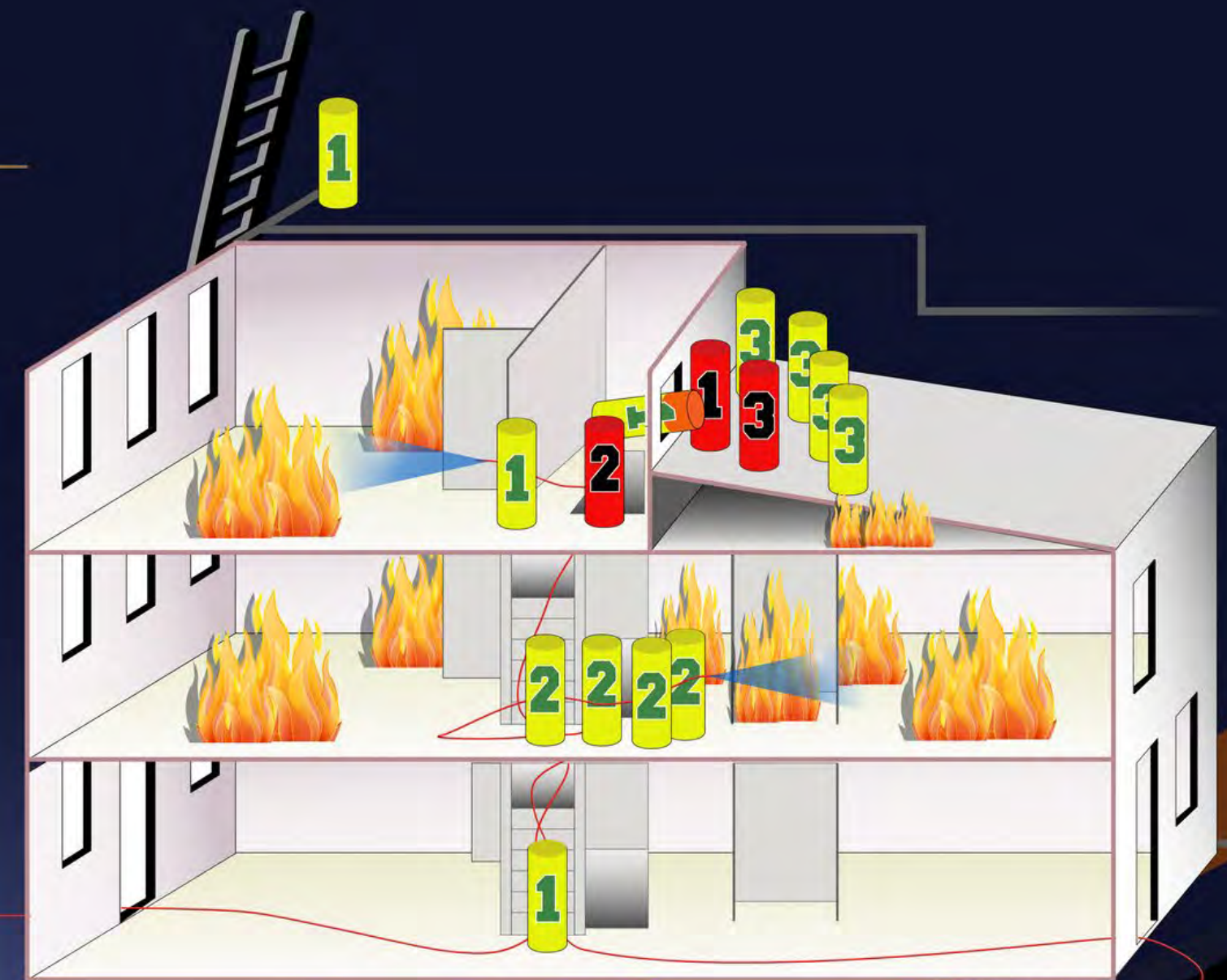
Credit: Grant Towner

Recruit Live-Fire Training Fatality



- Floor 1 fire started 7 min. prior to entry
- No one was told of the fire.
- Pallets, excelsior, tires, couch, etc.
- Conditions deteriorated, instructor exited
- Team 2 put out Floor 1 fire, advanced to 2.

Recruit Live-Fire Training Fatality



- Team 2 begins attack on 2.
- Victim unable to exit through window.

- Victim becomes motionless.
- Team 3 and Team 2 instructor remove victim.



Newark Double LODD July 5, 2023

- NFPA 1405 (Guide for land-based fire departments that respond to marine vessel fires) outlines pre-incident planning, vessel familiarization and training.

NFPA 1405

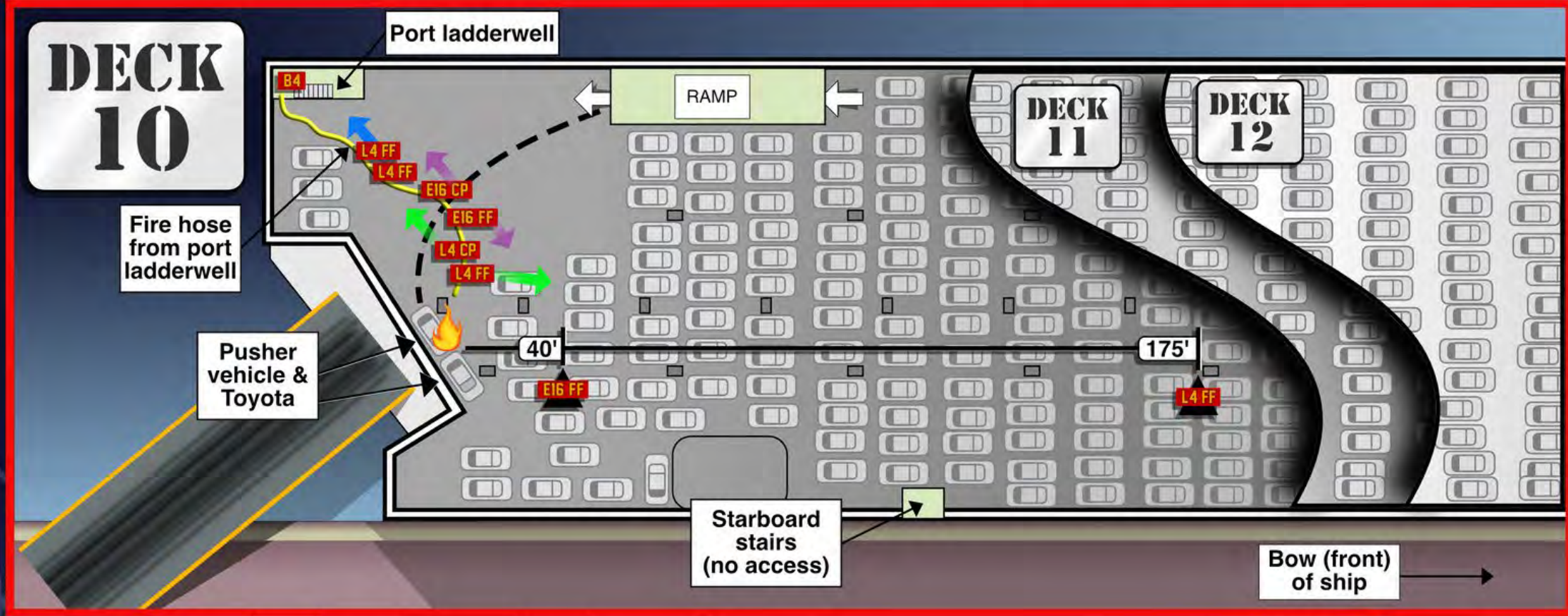
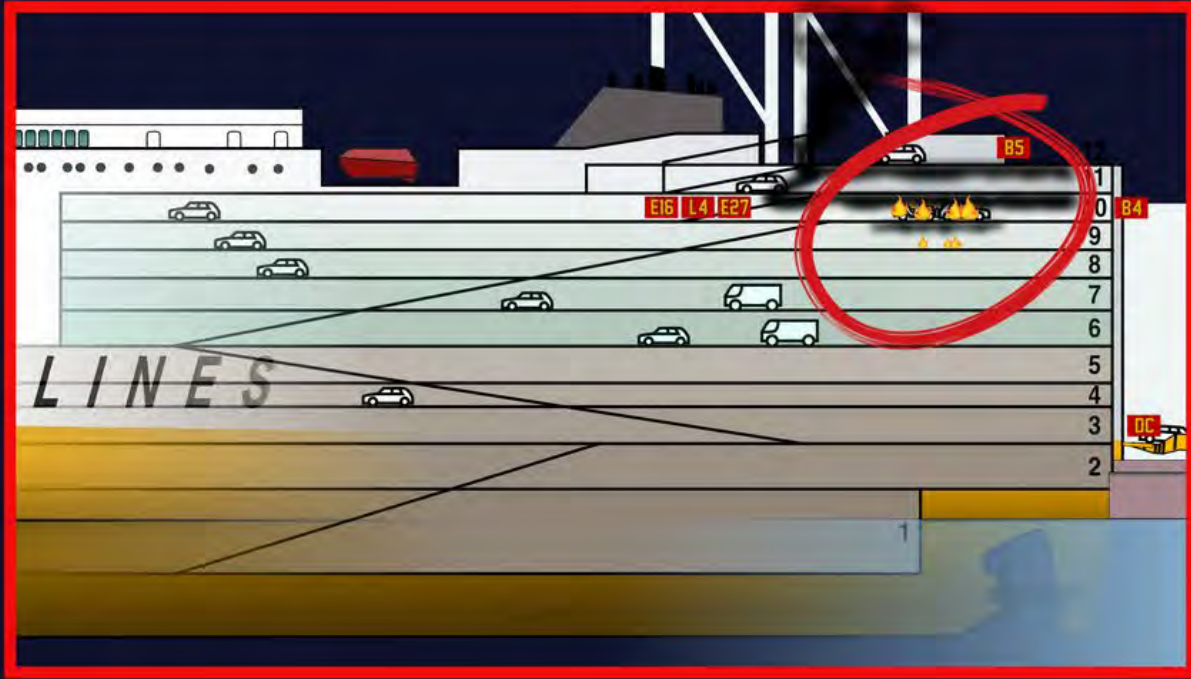
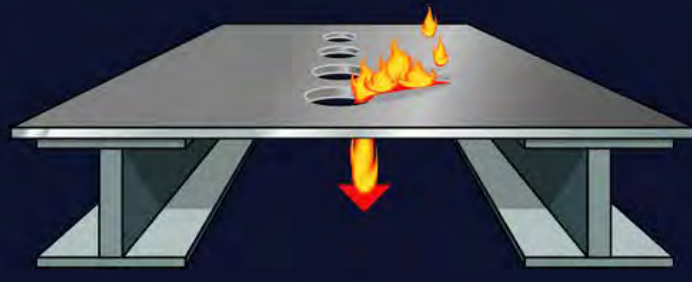
Guide for
Land-Based Fire Departments That
Respond to Marine Vessel Fires

2020

National
Transportation
Safety Board



"Fire aboard Roll-on/Roll-off
Container Vessel"



Multi-Company "Summer Drill" July 4, 2023



- Brought in companies from across the city.
- 2-hour block.
- Started with a presentation, then a brief on three multi-company evolutions.



How we greet each other...

Normal



- Firm handshake
- Good eye contact

Firefighters

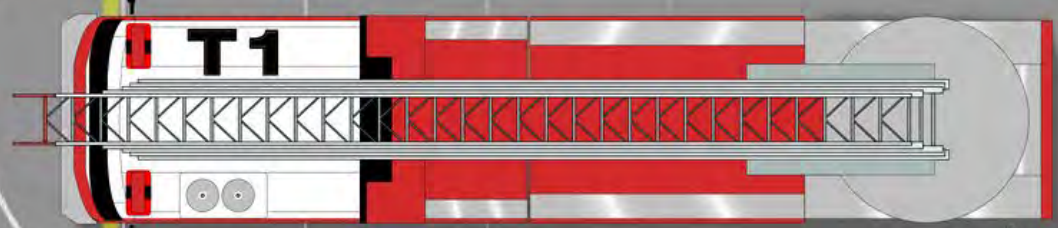


- Fold them like a lawn chair
- Get other person to submit/tap out



40 50 40 30 20

1st & 10



WE KNOW HORSEPLAY EXISTS
WE CONTINUE TO LET IT HAPPEN

WHY?

NO
NEGATIVE
CONSEQUENCES

FIRE TRAINING CENTER - COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

7-1

TRUCK 1

5-3

ENGINE 23

LET'S GO BACK
TO THE FIRST SLIDE →

10 7 12:16 2ND 1st & 10 08

Credit: Grant Tinker

Multi-Company "Summer Drill" July 4, 2023

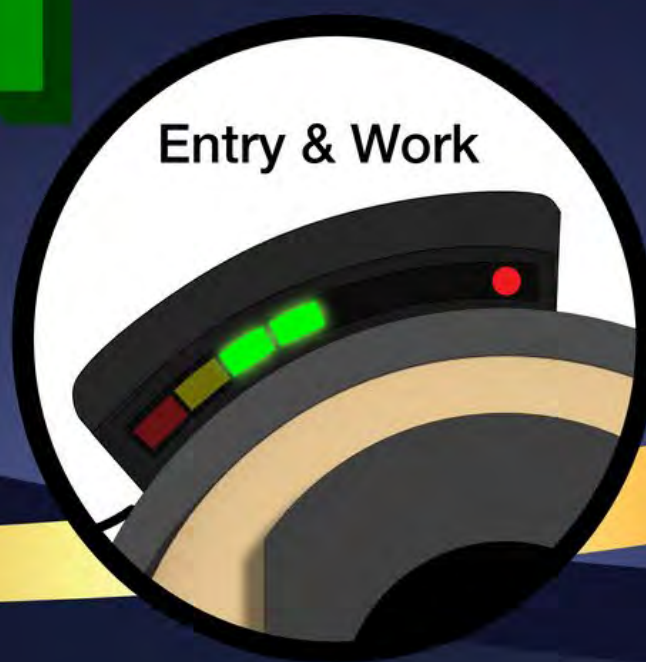
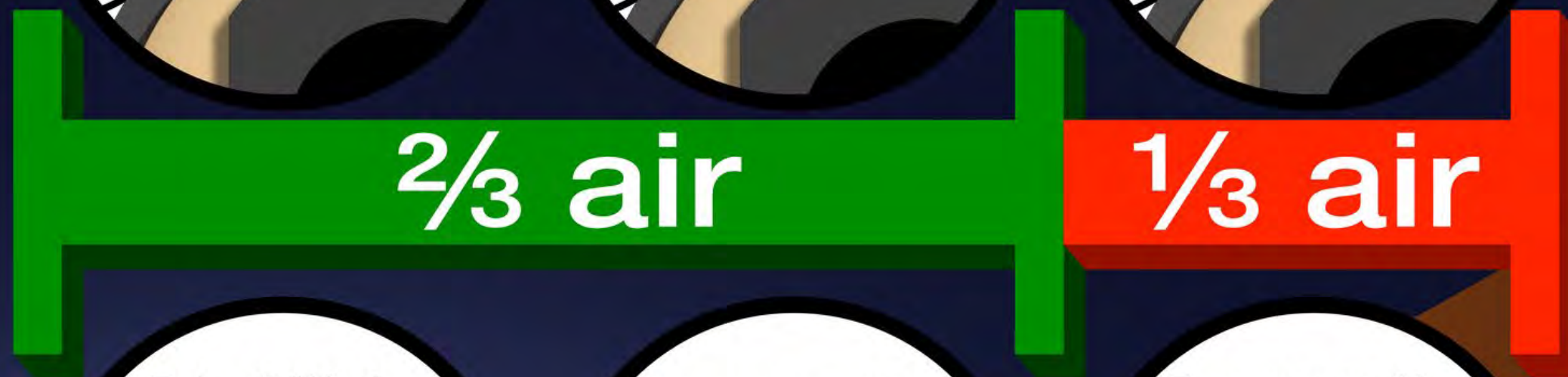


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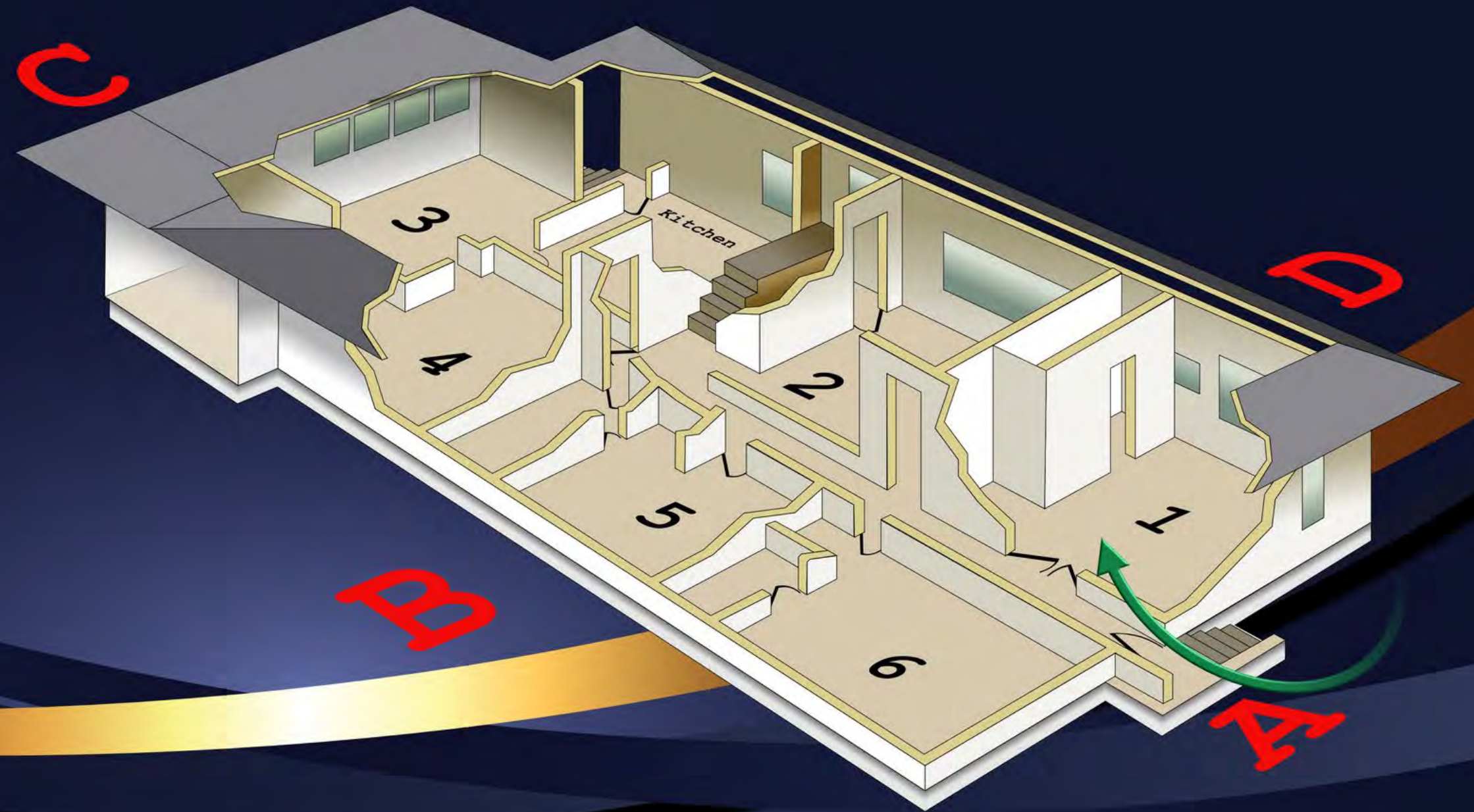


Air Management

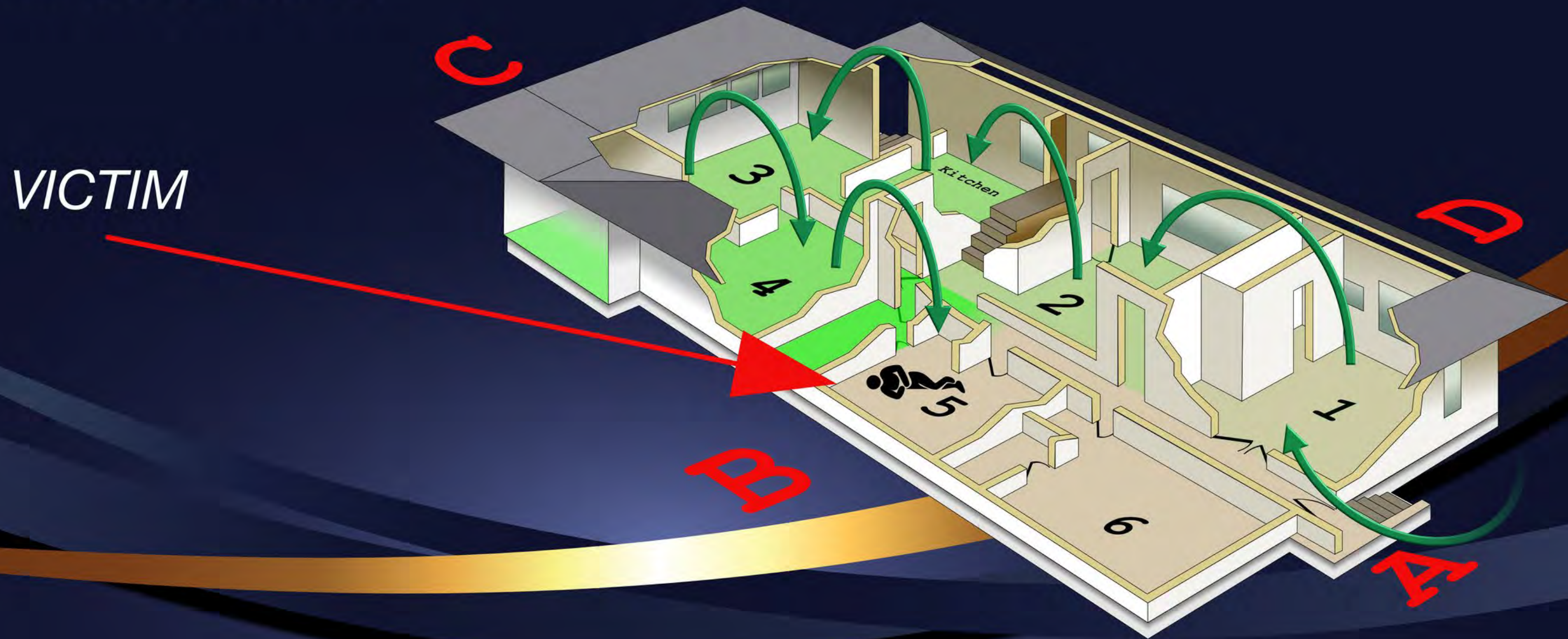
Safe level of air consumption



2-person search and rescue with a possible victim in bedroom



2-person search and rescue with a possible victim in bedroom



Egress from IDLH



OR

Emergency Air

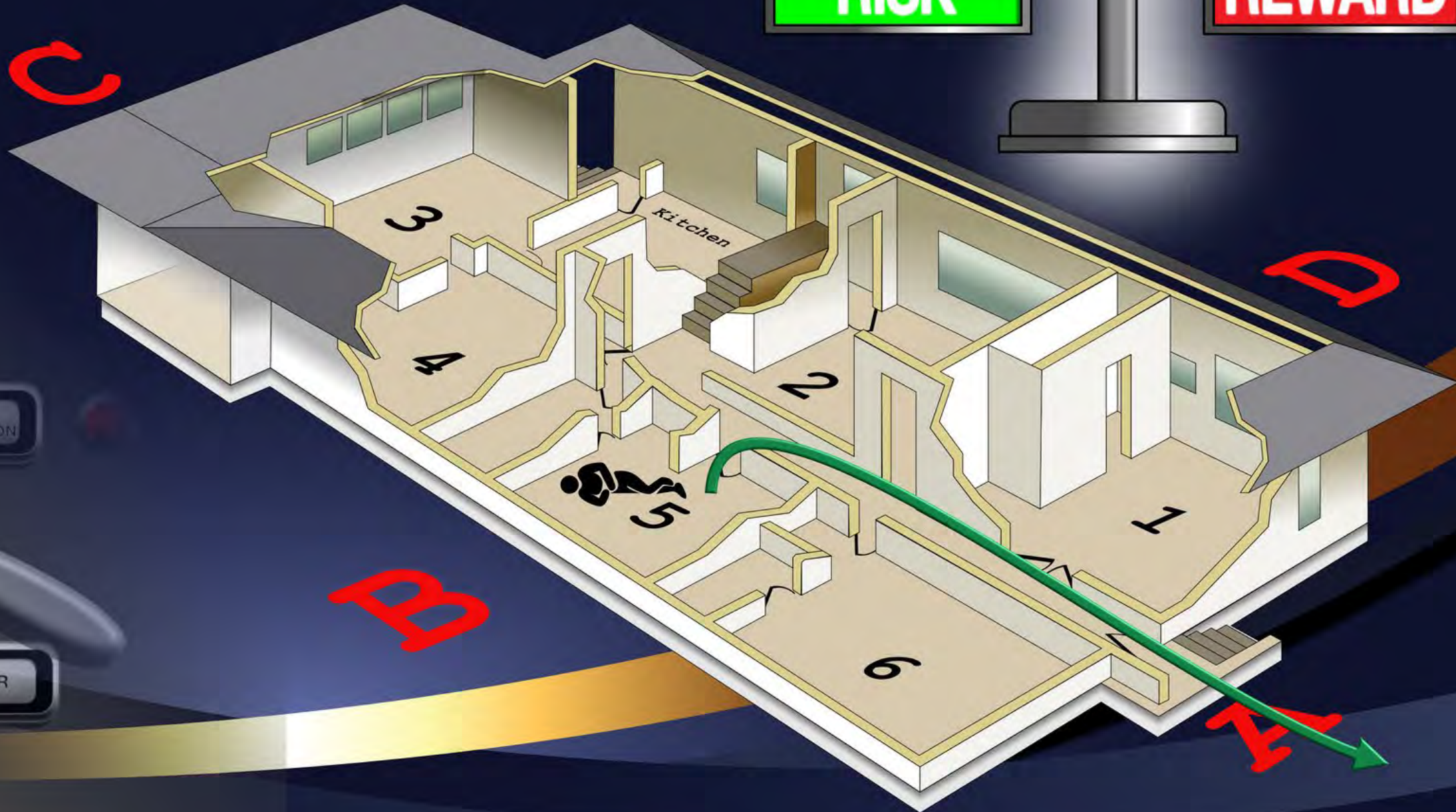


Continue with the evolution?

2-person search and rescue with a possible victim in bedroom



The control panel features several buttons: 'NO. 3 CHARGE', 'NO. 2 CROSSLAY', 'DELUGE DISCHARGE', 'CHECK TRANSMISSION', and 'PRIMER'. A central gauge is labeled 'RISK' and has three zones: 'LOW' (green), 'MEDIUM' (yellow), and 'HIGH' (red). To the left of the gauge are two warning labels: 'WARNING DO NOT OPEN THROTTLE UNLESS LIGHT IS ON' and 'CAUTION RELIEF VALVE DRAIN MUST BE CLOSED TO OPERATE PUMP'.



- Do we allow our members to continue to conduct their search or advance the hoseline even after their low alarm goes off?

- What is this teaching?

- Are we encouraging and allowing a practice that could (in real life) have catastrophic consequences?



Credit: Grant Tinker

What is the norm?

- *Answer:* Exiting the structure at amber light.

Where are we deviating?

- *Answer:* Allowing it to happen and become routine and acceptable.

Why are we deviating?

- *Answer:* We have pressure to execute the drill.

We have normalized conducting tasks past the point where we should turn around and go back.

Yes No
Did the candidate complete the evolution?
Yes No
the candidate perform in a safe manner?

What leads to Normalization of Deviance?



- Lack of knowledge/not knowing the SOP's
- Policies that are considered "stupid"
- Laziness
- Peer pressure
- "Unsafe see, unsafe do"
- Complacency
- Not saying something when something is not right
- Being a "passenger"



Turnout Times

NFPA

1710

Standard for the
Organization and Deployment
of Fire Suppression Operations,
Emergency Medical Operations,
and Special Operations to the
Public by Career Fire Departments

2020



- "First engine company should arrive within four minutes (90% of the time) and that the full first alarm assignments should arrive within eight minutes (90% of the time)."
- Speeding, PPE, pushing "Responding" seatbelts, etc.
- NFPA gives "Performance Objectives" not quotas.
- Meant for station placement, response models.
- If used as an evaluation metric, this creates goal conflict and enforces internal production pressure.
- Focuses on production and efficiency at the expense of life safety.



Distractions



Does Normalization of Deviance prevent innovation or change?

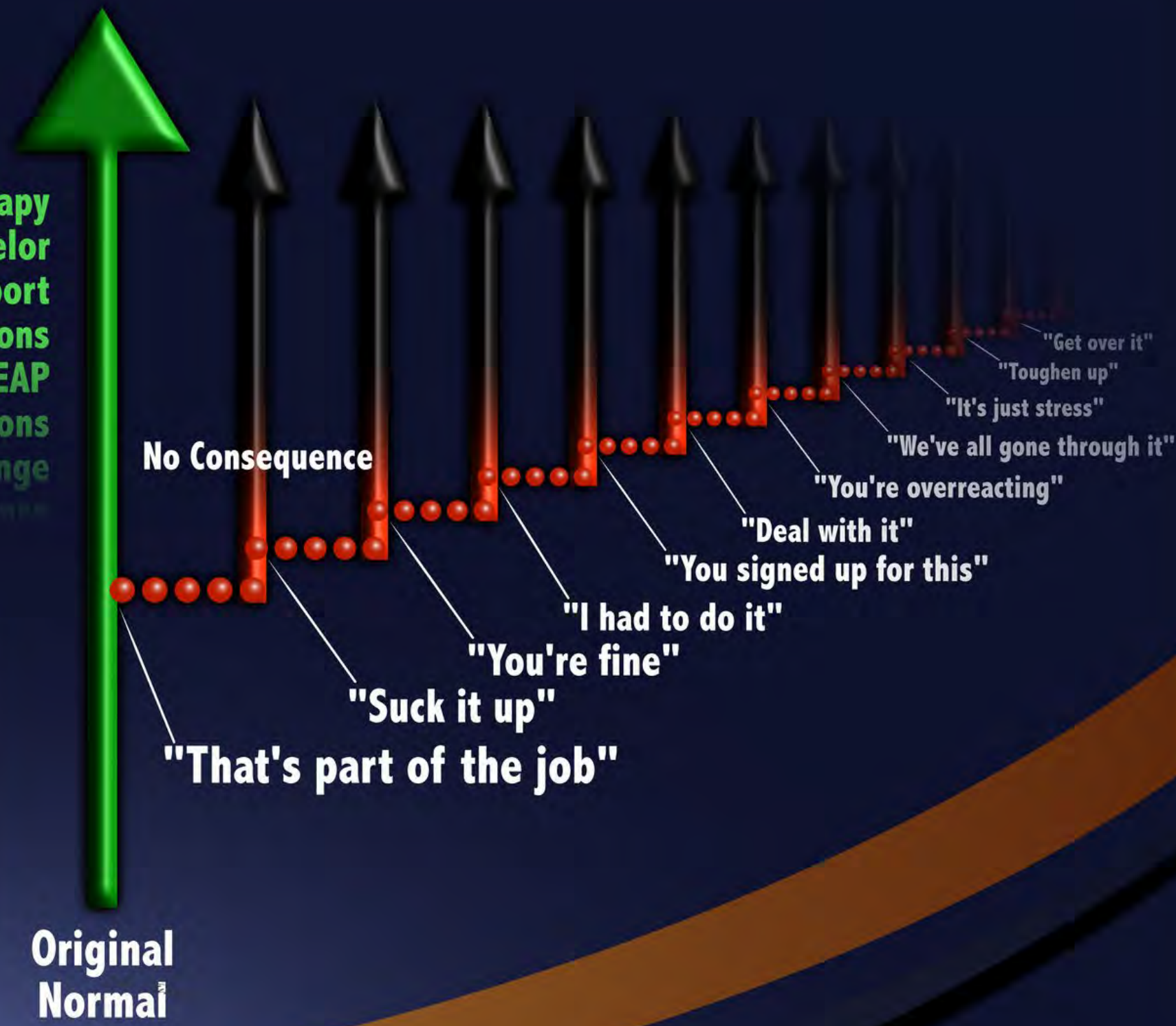
- Normalization of deviance is doing something you (or organization) **KNOWS** is wrong or dangerous as a way to take a short cut or cut corners to reach a goal.
- It is **NOT** saying we cannot be innovative and explore different ways of doing things.
- **Data driven** changes
example: 2 in/2 out changes



Behavioral Health

- Honesty becomes stigmatized
- It's okay to not be okay
- LISTEN, don't hear
- "I'm fine" becomes the norm
- Silence is rewarded

Therapy
Counselor
Peer Support
Accommodations
EAP
Move Stations
Schedule Change
Leave of Absence



Insomnia



Sadness



Substance Abuse



Suicidal Thoughts



Isolation



Can't Concentrate



Anger

How to combat Normalization of Deviance

Hearing vs Listening

Hearing: Passive. You catch the words, but don't engage.

(American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.)

Listening: Active: Interpret, respond, and support with intention.

(American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.)

DEPT-1-2370Z

- PASS activation sound
- Background radio traffic
- "I'm struggling"
- "I'm ok" or "I'm fine"

LISTENING
HEARING

Don't just hear...Listen

- Check-in after tough calls & follow-up
- Don't overlook changes in behavior, energy, or humor
- Take every cry for help seriously, even subtle ones
- Model help-seeking behavior by being vulnerable yourself



Psychological Safety

Amy Edmondson



PERSONAL SAFETY

GROWTH/SAFETY

SAFETY CULTURE

OR

**CULTURE OF
QUIET & COMPLY**



How to combat Normalization of Deviance

- Empower (expect) your people to speak up when they see something.
- If a policy or procedure needs to be changed...change it.
 - Be aware of red flags.
 - Don't take shortcuts that are risky.
 - Be a leader, and lead by example.
 - Hold people accountable...yourself too



What you may get away with today, will most certainly catch up with you tomorrow

- Opioid Epidemic/ Purdue Pharma (1996)
- Costa Concordia Cruise Ship (2012)
- Titanic (1912)
- Samsung Galaxy 7 battery fires (2016)
- Ford Pinto fuel system failures (1970)
- Mount St. Helens eruption (1980)
- Flint Water crisis (2014)
- Coconut Grove Nightclub fire (1942)
- Takata Airbag recall (2013)
- I-35 Bridge Collapse (2007)
- Kobe Bryant Helicopter Crash (2020)

- Station Nightclub fire (2003)
- Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989)
- Surfside, Florida Condo Collapse (2021)
- Philadelphia row house collapse (2023)
- Charleston Sofa Super Store fire (2007)
- Worcester Cold Storage fire (1999)
- Varnell Hill fire (2013)
- DeKalb County Fire Rescue engine rollover (2009)
- Boston Ladder 26 crash (2009)
- Delray Beach FD Train Crossing Crash (2023)
- Newark Cargo Ship

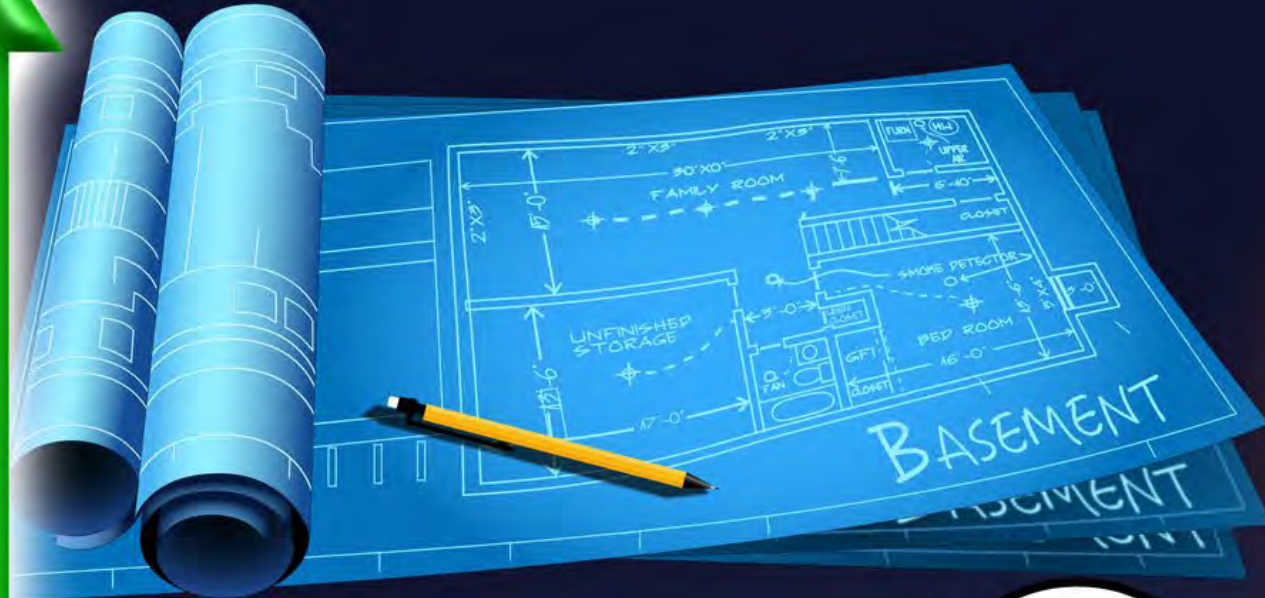


© Tinker

Life Applications

Construction
May Begin!!!

- Permit Issued
- Permit Review
(5 business days)
- Pay Remaining Fees
- Site Inspection
(10 business days)
- Submit Revisions
- Application Review
(5 business days)
- Pay Application Fees
- Application Review
(5 business days)
- Upload Files
- Application Review
(5 business days)
- Submit Application



- YouTube Framing
- YouTube Electrical
- YouTube Plumbing
- YouTube Insulation
- YouTube Drywall
- YouTube Windows
- YouTube Sump Pump
- YouTube HVAC



1st Deviation

Normal

Permitting
Process

Widow of LA County Firefighter Sues Homeowner for Wrongful Death (2022)

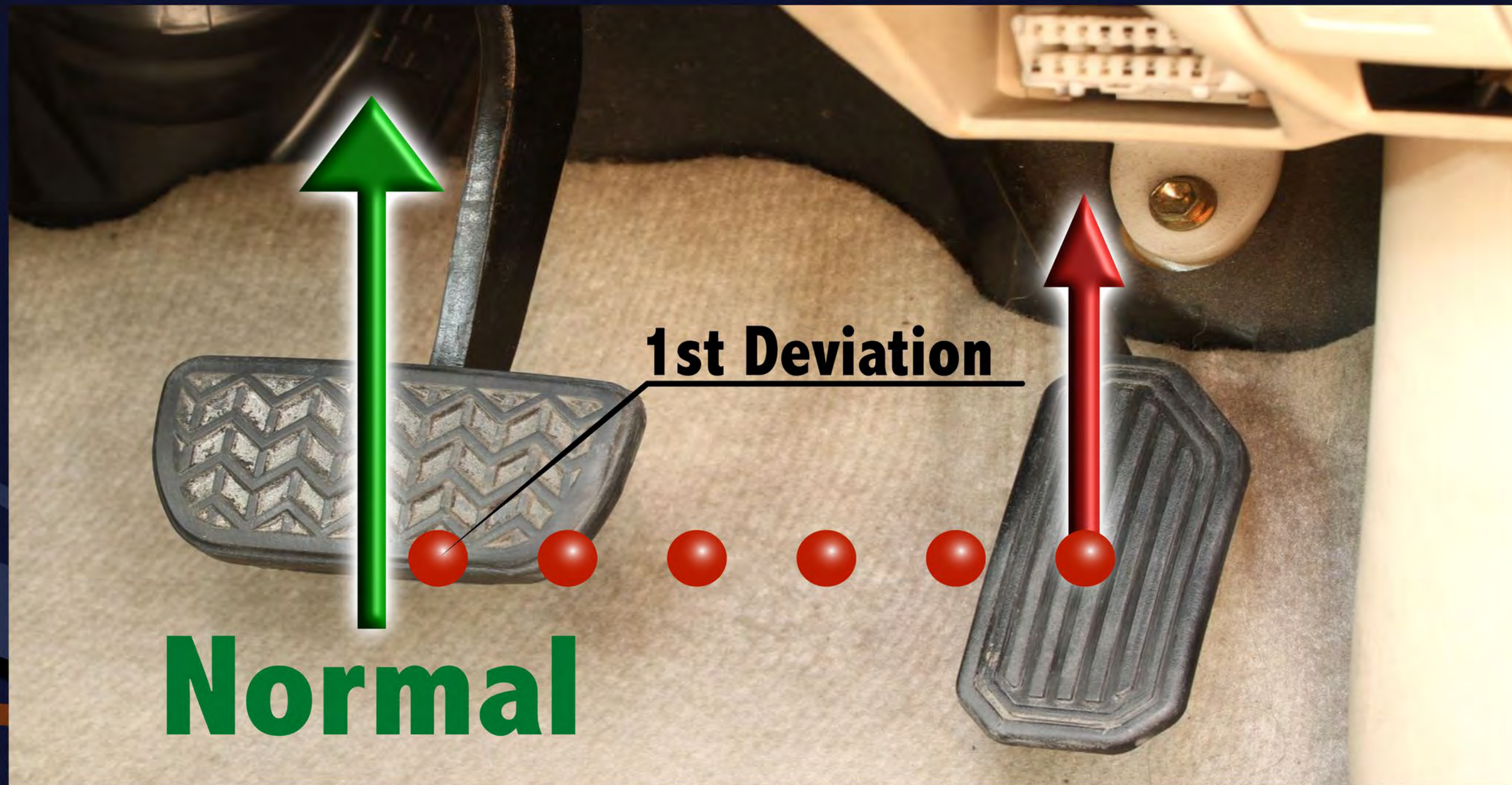
"...filed suit against the homeowner claiming that an illegal addition to the residence is responsible for his death."

Source: www.firelawblog.com





Normal



Normal

1st Deviation

Drivers Permit...2 hours



First Accident...







**WELCOME TO
COLORFUL
COLORADO**





December 26, 2022



Normal

Deviation

Normal



grant.tinker@coloradosprings.gov

*Thank
You*

DO NOT DISMISS

WARNING



**DO YOUR JOB
DO THE RIGHT THING**



EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"

For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

