



(January 22, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: Information letter on Safety Conference**

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Brothers and Sisters:

After a hiatus of more than 6 years, the National VA Council will be sponsoring a Safety Conference from February 22 through 26, 2016.

Safety is one of the most important duties for the VA. Both management and AFGE agreed, in Article 29, Section 1 of the Master Agreement, that

The parties recognize that a safe and healthful work environment is valued by the Department; is necessary for the accomplishment of the Department's missions; and contributes to a high quality of life for the employees.

To provide for this safe and healthful work environment, training is necessary, which is why the Safety Conference was undertaken. However, management does not seem to place the same emphasis on training as AFGE does, or to the same extent they agreed in the Master Agreement.

We are aware of the fact that management has not only not agreed to provide support for the Conference by helping to defray travel costs, but they have also denied official time for Conference and have instead required that participants take annual leave. Both of these are unacceptable, and clearly in violation of Article 29 of the Master Agreement. The Council has submitted a National Grievance on this issue, and we strongly suggest that if you are denied either of these, you submit a grievance at the local level.

We cannot emphasize the importance of safety and safety training. Each local should ensure that both the Local President and the Safety Representative have sufficient background to ensure a safe workplace, and the first step is to attend this Conference. Beyond the Conference, each Local should closely study the provisions of Article 29, and ensure that every opportunity afforded the Local by that Article to improve the safety conditions at your facility is utilized, and that the proper time – in many cases, duty time and not official time – is used.

We are very disappointed in management's indifference to safety and safety education. But it is such an important part of what we do, we cannot wait for management to understand the effects of such indifference. I hope to see each of you in Las Vegas at the safety conference, and can promise you that we will work aggressively to ensure that your annual leave is restored timely.

Alma Lee