

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, No It's the Supervisor!

As we near Christmas, for most in the Christian world the season of celebration of the birth of Jesus, there is another that we should remember and recognize who this year celebrated his 80th birthday on April 18th.

His name is Kal-El, son of Jor-El, aka Clark Kent, but to most of us he is simply known as Superman.

He was said to be born on the planet of Krypton, and sent to Earth by his parents in a space capsule just before the destruction of his birth planet due to a natural catastrophe. This showed great foresight and planning by his parents that should be a lesson in emergency planning for us all.

After crash landing on Earth somewhere near the town of Smallville, USA, he was found and adopted by a farmer and his wife, Jonathan & Martha Kent, who raised him as their own and instilled strict moral training into the young Clark, who vowed to only use his emerging super-human capabilities for the safety of the human race.

So there you have it. Superman was a safety guy first and foremost. A safety guy with an alter ego, much like most supervisors working in oil & gas, many who, not only have their own occupational responsibilities to satisfy for their employer, but are also expected to direct and supervise, new, less experienced and less competent workers in the workplace to keep them all safe.

Latin: Super or Supra means above or over, vis means see = Over-see-or = Overseer or Supervisor

The safety workload expected of supervisors has this year been greatly expanded under new legislation introduced by the Alberta and Canadian Governments with Bills 30, C45 and C46.

BILL 30 AN ACT TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF WORKING ALBERTANS

BILL C-45 THE CANNABIS ACT & BILL C-46, AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CANADA)

Superman was committed to saving the lives of humans but was also a staunch supporter of law enforcement and was most famously known for his battles with his arch enemy, the criminal, evil, genius / inventor Lex Luthor.

There are other analogies that apply to Superman and to supervisors. PPE for example, personal protective equipment, required to protect the wearer as a last resort from hazards that can't be eliminated by engineering or administrative controls. Superman donned a very distinctive suit & cape that provided protection from bullets, explosions, fire, radiation and just about every other kind of threat one can imagine and supervisors have a duty to themselves and workers under their supervision to ensure, they and their workers, wear and are trained in the proper use of, PPE (examples include steel-toed boots, hard hats, safety glasses, high visibility vests, flame resistant clothing, ear plugs, breathing apparatus, etc.).

When Superman is disguised as the bespectacled Clark Kent, he deliberately avoids violent confrontation and harassment, to the point of perceived cowardice. This is consistent with new Canada-wide OHS rules and those introduced with Bill 30 that make harassment and violence in the workplace a thing of the past and liable for severe repercussions.

Now I'm not suggesting that all safety guys should don a full bodied, skin-tight leotard emblazoned with a giant "S" on the chest, but if they did, it would certainly differentiate the times when they are performing their safety role as opposed to their normal operational duties. And "S" does stand for "Safety" as well as for "Super".

Superman is capable of super speed when changing between identities; supervisors would waste way too much time just changing clothes as their roles intermingle constantly throughout the work day, and besides, where can you find a telephone box in the field in which to change clothes anyway, even in town they are becoming scarce.

Superman does have a vulnerability, in the form of Kryptonite, a mineral from his home planet that can deprive him of his super powers, weaken or potentially kill him. Similarly, supervisors and workers in the oil & gas industry are trained in the awareness and dangers of potential exposure to H₂S (hydrogen sulphide) which would have equally devastating consequences for them.

Now Superman can fly and at speeds that defy the imagination beyond the speed of light, which means that even time travel is possible. This can be really handy if something unplanned and unwanted occurs. A quick return to the past to correct an action or incident that could change an undesired outcome in the future would be a really good tool to have in the toolbox of a safety practitioner.

Unfortunately we are not there just yet, although technologies are being developed at such break-neck speeds that I wouldn't count that capability out forever. The laser beam that Superman can project from his eyes that will melt steel or see through objects and his super hearing are technologies that are feasible today.

The message is that the supervisor is the key to a company's success in keeping a safe workplace in an environment of ever increasing legislative and operational demands. He is the individual who is charged with communicating to workers the employer's policies and procedures and is the one who is most likely to have the respect and day-to-day attention of front-line workers.

In conclusion although Superman was a safety guy, not every safety guy is a superman. Also not every supervisor is a safety guy and it should be realized that he will need training and employer support to get to a level of competency that will keep those under his direction safe.

The CAGC recommends that companies visit the Energy Safety Canada website frequently at the following link www.energysafetycanada.com to stay current with the tools and resources that are being developed for compliance with legislated requirements for supervisors.

These include but are not limited to, Hazard Identification, Harassment & Violence in the Workplace, Accident Investigation, Competency Management Systems, Fit-for-Duty, Supervisor Competency, Canadian Model for Providing a Safe Workplace version 6, Standards for Competent Supervision to Prevent Critical Outcomes (IRP 7) and Supervisor Leadership for Health & Safety in the Workplace.

Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman!

Yes, it's Superman, strange visitor from another planet who came to earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. Superman, who can change the course of mighty rivers, bend steel in his bare hands. And who, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, fights a never ending battle for truth, justice and the American way.

