



SAFETY CHAMPION AWARDS

Workplace injury early in his career helped spur Michael Barnes to become a safety champion



Years ago, before he started working with the City of Houston, Michael Barnes suffered a workplace injury. That injury and subsequent workplace safety lessons he learned from a supervisor after he joined the city in 2008 changed everything for him.

MICHAEL BARNES
Fleet Management Department
Shop Manager
Northeast Service Center

Barnes — who has now been with the city for 14 years, the last three as shop manager for the Fleet Management Department's Northeast Service Center — has developed a reputation as an effective safety advocate. He has taken a hands-on approach to making his workplace safer, and he has championed safety awareness among colleagues daily.

Barnes not only was promoted up the ranks from mechanic to shop manager, he was recently recognized as a ZIP Safety Champion in March.

Fleet Management Department Director Gary Glasscock and HR Safety Advisor Reno Wilkins

Greg Miller applies daily lessons to make FMD shop safer and more efficient



Greg Miller is a City of Houston Fleet Management Department veteran. He has worked with FMD for a decade and worked his way up to Heavy Duty Shop manager. But he says he still learns more about safety every day.

GREG MILLER
Fleet Management Department
Fire Department Fleet Services
Heavy Duty Shop Manager

Those lessons are not just learned — he applies them in the workplace to help make the shop a better, more efficient and safer place to work. That's why FMD Director Gary Glasscock and HR Safety Advisor Reno Wilkins convened Miller and his colleagues at the Dart Street facility to present him with a ZIP Safety Champion Award on April 5.

Miller started working as a mechanic at at AutoNation Toyota as a line technician. He started working with the City of Houston as a mechanic in 2012 and now oversees the maintenance of heavy firefighting vehicles such as pumpers, ladder trucks, and aircraft rescue and firefighting equipment.

presented Barnes with the Safety Champion Award on March 22, with colleagues on hand to congratulate him for the recognition.

After the presentation, Barnes answered a few questions about how safety became central to how he approaches working with the City of Houston:

How did you become interested in safety?

I worked for dealerships where safety was not a priority, and that resulted in my own personal injury that could have been avoided with proper training and safety practices. With the City of Houston, I was taught the importance of being safe by my shop manager, Clifford Nash.

What are some improvements you suggested or made that led to a safer work environment or process?

One of the most important practices is that a clean shop is a safe shop. I have implemented a practice that after door calls are complete, stalls and surrounding areas would be inspected for oil leaks that needed to be cleaned to prevent oil from running into storm drains. I also implemented an open-door policy where technicians can openly report missing or defective shop equipment without fear of repercussions.

Describe the Northeast Service Center and the shop you manage.

The Northeast Service Center is one of the largest service centers in Houston. My largest crew was 24 people. The Northeast Service Center is responsible for maintaining the Solid Waste Department fleet for the northeast quadrant of Houston. Our service center also runs heavy duty and light vehicle shops that maintain and repair all BARC units, Public Works Department units, Health and Human Services units, Department of Neighborhoods units, Solid Waste Light Vehicle units and Parking Management units.

We also have a welding and fabrication shop that supports Public Works and Solid Waste and a full-service tire shop that supports the entire Solid Waste department in addition to any other departments that requires their assistance.

How do you stress the importance of workplace safety?

We start each shift with a daily meeting that covers several safety topics determined by the individual shop's safety needs. I've created an environment where frequent reinforcement of safe work habits are exhibited throughout the work day.

This ZIP presentation is not his first award. In March, Miller was named "Emergency Vehicle Technician of the Year" by the Texas Association of Emergency Vehicle Technicians at the Southwest Emergency Vehicle Technician Conference in Fort Worth.

In a Q&A, Miller described his background and approach to management and safety.

Tell us a little about your background.

Previously, I was a mechanic three at Japhet, a shop that mainly works on Houston Public Works vehicles. Before I worked for the city, I worked as a mechanic at AutoNation Toyota. I was a line technician. I have been a shop manager for four of the 10 years I've been with the city.

How did you become interested in safety?

Although I learn more and more about safety on a daily basis, seeing the benefits of working in a safe environment gives my employees and myself motivation to strive for a safer environment. Oftentimes, a safe environment leads to greater productivity and, of course, ensures we all go home safe after our workday.

What are some safety improvements you have made or suggested?

We have recently looked at changing small things such as floor drains to a different type in efforts to reduce trip hazards. We have also been looking at ways to reduce shop clutter by eliminating underutilized equipment and supplies. Small things, such as changing the types of oil drain caddies, can reduce the strain needed to move them around, thus improving the efficiency of the employees and reducing the risk of injury. We have made many improvements such as these throughout the years.

Tell us about the workplace you manage.

There are 20 employees in this shop including myself. Our shop maintains and repairs every fire truck in the City of Houston for the Houston Fire Department. We are responsible for the success of 89 pumpers, 38 Ladders, 40-plus reserve apparatus, and over 20 utility and rescue apparatus.

What do you do to convey the importance of safety to other staff there?

We discuss safety concerns around the shop on a daily basis, mostly on an individual level. Anything that can improve the safety and efficiency of our work area is taken into consideration, and usually is addressed immediately.

