

Testimony of Mike Lee
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Vice President, Nucor Corporation
Hearing on Promoting Safe Workplaces Through Voluntary Protection Programs
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Woolsey, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity. I want to begin by asking you to imagine a program where government auditors are invited by employers to conduct comprehensive workplace regulatory compliance audits.

Imagine a government program built on trust and cooperation among government and industry participants.

Imagine a government program that requires above and beyond regulatory standards – with a backlog of applicants trying to get in.

Imagine a government program that helps save lives, substantially reduce injuries, and improve the bottom line for businesses.

It isn't hard to imagine. It exists now in OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program or "VPP".

I am Mike Lee, General Manager of Nucor Steel Decatur in Alabama where we employ over 700 teammates at our state of the art sheet steel mill. I am also Vice President of Nucor Corporation. With a production capacity that exceeds 26 million tons, Nucor is the largest steel producer in the United States. We are also one of the largest recyclers of any kind.

"Nucor is made up of more than 20,000 teammates whose goal is to take care of our customers by being the safest, highest quality, lowest cost, most productive, and most profitable steel and steel products company in the world." That is our mission, as forcefully stated by our Chairman and CEO, Dan DiMicco.

But you can't be the most productive and profitable steel mill in the world and not also be the best in safety. They all go together. We believe we are the best, but we are always striving to improve.

The cornerstone of Nucor's continuous safety and health improvements is VPP. I am proud to have worked as a management teammate as three of Nucor's OSHA VPP Star sites worked through the process: Nucor Steel Hertford County, which became the company's first steel mill to successfully complete OSHA's VPP in 2006; Nucor Steel Nebraska; and now Nucor Steel Decatur.

OSHA's VPP is America's premier voluntary safety and health program, recognizing the best of the best in employer safety and health programs. Of the approximately 7 million U.S. employers eligible for OSHA VPP, only about 2,375 have qualified. That's only .03 percent.

Nucor Corporation currently has 20 VPP sites and 9 sites in similar cooperative safety programs. All other members of the Nucor family are working toward VPP. We also have 20 Special Government Employees from 13 Divisions working alongside OSHA professionals to improve workplace safety and health.

Nucor's safety goal, as is OSHA's, is zero incidents and accidents. This is why we strongly support the cooperative government-industry approach of VPP. The foremost beneficiaries of VPP are Nucor teammates who, at day's end, safely arrive home to their families. But there is also a significant benefit to Nucor: a safer workplace means healthier and more productive teammates, better morale, and a strong sense of teamwork.

VPP will not work if it is the sole responsibility of a safety director – a safety cop, if you will – looking over an employee's shoulder. Nor should it ever be necessary for an OSHA inspector to be present to instruct every American worker how to do his or her job safely. VPP is not a top down or bottom up approach. It is a partnership between primary safety stakeholders: OSHA, management, employers and employees.

To be successful with VPP, you have to trust your employees and empower them to participate in their site's safety and health programs. And management cannot just give lip service support for VPP. Managers and supervisors have to roll up their sleeves and work at safety every day just as hourly workers must.

At our VPP site in Decatur, for example, we start every meeting with a discussion of safety and health issues. We recognize areas of potential concern and make plans to achieve our safety goals. This activity occurs on every shift. Our VPP culture invites our teammates to find, report, and help us work as a team to address opportunities for improvement.

A great example occurred just last week. In preparation for Nucor Steel Decatur's upcoming VPP Star re-evaluation, we invited 9 team members from 3 other Nucor VPP Star sites to join our teammates in conducting a two-day assessment of one of our production departments. Not one of these folks was a full-time safety professional. They were all hourly, production men and women who make up our Safety Teams. That is VPP—taking hourly operators and turning them into safety professionals through leadership support, hazard recognition training, worksite analysis and effective safety and health training.

Perhaps I am a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I'm also a doer and so are thousands of VPP workers who are practicing the VPP philosophy every day. The goal of zero will never change. The Nucor—OSHA VPP partnership will continue to drive improvements in safety and health. VPP works. VPP saves lives and Nucor Corporation is proud to be a part of it.

Thank you.