

Podcast Title: Multi-Lab Safety Week

Season: 1, Episode 21

Host: Dianne Wentworth

Guest: Asmita Patel, Jeroen van Tilborg

Air Date: June 4, 2025

Running Time: 10:29

---

**Dianne Wentworth:** [00:00:00] Good day. This is Dianne Wentworth with Strategic Communications, and I have two guests with me today.

I have Asmita Patel, who's the deputy division director, operations for ATAP, and Jeroen van Tilborg, who's the director of the experimental program at the Bella Center. So Asmita, we wanna talk about the multi-lab safety week that's coming up. Can you tell me a little bit about it? You started this safety event 10 years ago. How did that come about?

**Asmita Patel:** We started this 10 years ago because ATAP had a tradition of conducting what is called a workplace self-assessment. And they were called Quest assessments, and during these Quest assessments, each program within each research program in ATAP cleaned out their spaces and had them assessed by cross-program walkthroughs. The Lab at that time had also launched the work planning and control system, and we were transitioning. From the Job hazard analysis system to the [00:01:00] WPC system, we wanted to take the opportunity to conduct training for WPC that day as well.

So, we decided to dedicate a full day to safety-related activities. This would be an opportunity to step aside from our busy schedules, take a fresh look at our areas, review activities, and obtain feedback from our colleagues.

**Dianne Wentworth:** So, when you started this event 10 years ago, was it an entire week? You said it was just one day at that point, right?

**Asmita Patel:** When we started this in 2015, it was a full day. It was very successful. And the feedback that we got that it was an excellent team building event, so we held it again in 2016, and over the years, it evolved into a feature-rich week-long event that included divisions from Berkeley Lab and also other national laboratories. During the pandemic, we had a limited number of people coming on site per day, and we wanted to [00:02:00] give everyone the flexibility to participate in activities.

**Dianne Wentworth:** But now you mentioned that you had other labs joining you, other labs outside of Berkeley Lab. How did that come about?

The little bit of history to this is that we have, in ATAP, we have a few DOE 413 projects. The one project that we have that I would like to focus on is they call the high luminosity LHC Accelerator upgrade project. We just call it the AUP project, and this is a collaboration between Fermi Lab, that's the lead lab, Brookhaven National Lab, and Berkeley Lab. And as part of this project, the safety points of contacts from each of these three labs we've been meeting regularly for several years now.

We discuss processes that are part of the project issues we encounter and solutions to these issues, and it's an opportunity for us to learn and share best practices. So, during one of these [00:03:00] meetings, Pat Thomas and I discussed our safety week, and both our colleagues from Fermi Lab and Brookhaven National Lab wanted us to help them organize it.

And we thought, instead of having it three different times, again, for efficiency, we decided to have it as a joint multi-lab safety week.

So now that you've done this several years as a multi-lab week, what are the benefits of doing it as a multi-lab event?

**Asmita Patel:** The cross-lab collaboration provided an opportunity to learn and share best practices and build an absolutely invaluable network with colleagues and subject matter experts from participating national labs. These relationships we have built over the years with our colleagues, we call them our sister labs, are priceless. We touch base with each other when we want to get a different [00:04:00] perspective on issues and anything related to projects or processes and together we have spread the word about the importance of safety, the fun activities that we have, and how it provides an annual safety culture reset to help raise the awareness and importance of safety and integrated safety management, which is very aligned with Berkeley Lab and DOE Mission.

**Dianne Wentworth:** Now, do you have anything new for this year's safety week?

Yes, we do. This year, in addition to Fermi Lab and Brookhaven National Lab, we have the Accelerator Directorate from SLAC and Accelerator Systems Division from Argonne National Lab joining us. At Berkeley Lab we have our colleagues from Facilities division and Security and Emergency Services Division joining the event, and we are very excited to work with our colleagues from both of these [00:05:00] divisions.

So Jeroen the theme of this week, Asmita has shared, is learning from experimental planning. What does that mean and how do you apply that to your daily work?

**Jeroen van Tilborg:** As someone in charge of the experimental program, this of course affects me and my colleagues dearly. Traditionally, we often think every day when we go show up at work that we know what we're gonna do that day.

There's no need to talk about it too much. We've been trained. We have the experiments, we have the experience, and we're just gonna address obstacles as they come our way and provide solutions. This is really where planning comes in, right?

Even something simple as writing a planning paragraph a few days earlier, or sharing an email with the team a few days early with a to-do list, or maybe having a little team huddle in the morning to itemize activities. We know that will help the team make it much further into the day and into the week before, unforeseen events kick in.

Experimental planning, it allows the timing order of activities to be [00:06:00] properly addressed. Maybe it turns out there's a conflict. One person is really counting on the lab to be empty and another person is counting on the lab to be accessible or that needs the light on and the other person needs the light off.

So these kind of conflicts can be resolved. And the other thing I wanna point out anytime there is some planning activity, people come up with comments, people realize, Hey, did you think about, the vacuum environment, the electrical work the high pressure gas systems?

Are you aware that when you're working on this laser there, that someone else is nearby and might not be comfortable executing that task? Planning ahead of time really saves a lot of time and makes the whole process just more efficient and more pleasant.

**Dianne Wentworth:** I've heard from other safety professionals that a lot of times it's difficult to get people to speak up. Is there a method that you use to get these comments flowing from people so they don't feel that they're being negative or disrespectful to the team by speaking up?

**Jeroen van Tilborg:** I think maybe the number one key to safety and planning, is trust. So [00:07:00] the team, when they come together, you need to trust each other, right? You can only really brainstorm about potential safety topics or operational steps if you feel like you're being listened to and you're not gonna be made fun of, or there's no jokes.

And also, you also wanna make sure that anything you suggest doesn't immediately lead to an overreaction, right? Because, if suddenly every comment triggers a shut down and a safety review then people are just gonna learn to stay quiet. Trust is important. Bring up ideas, and yes, of course, there's gonna be a follow-up discussion and maybe an additional safety analysis, but things have to be in proportion.

Anytime you bring a new group of people together, there's not gonna be that immediate trust, but with kind of the critical mass of people who've worked together before you, get to that point very quickly.

**Dianne Wentworth:** What about closing the loop when you're doing that sort of discussion? Do you have a feedback, a mechanism for collecting these sort of comments and then implementing them for the next round?

**Jeroen van Tilborg:** Yeah, I think that's indeed very important. And it's part of the ISM [00:08:00] circle the feedback and improvement. And to be honest, I think this is where we can still further improve on. We often are very focused in safety analysis and then executing the work and going through all the effort to make the process efficient.

And then when it's done, we move on as quickly as possible. But that feedback and improvement is so important because it can really go both ways, right? Maybe the safety analysis or the planning there were deficiencies and something overseen or overlooked.

And so that needs to be addressed for the next time. But the other side of things, it could also be that the safety analysis is over restrictive. And I think there is very important that there is a follow-up email or summary or even closeout meeting set up to go over these. What could we do better? Or where did we do too much? Did we overthink it? And are you really doing yourself and your own team and your lab colleagues a big favor by closing that, that loop? And

**Dianne Wentworth:** Final question for you, Jeroen.

We talk about safety being everyone's responsibility. How does that translate in two or three steps [00:09:00] to any type of work that you do at the Lab?

**Jeroen van Tilborg:** The important thing is to realize is that there's a lot of individuals at any lab like Berkeley Lab and everyone has their own set of expertise that they've built up over the years.

We've learned that having a kickoff meeting or a planning meeting early on, like weeks or months ahead of any task or project and bringing in a diverse group of people it is gonna be

incredibly productive. There's people with electrical background, radiation, mechanical, gas pressure systems, etc.

And it only takes one comment for someone to realize, hey, did you just say this? But if that's what you're gonna do, are you sure you wanna use this equipment? And not that it only takes that 10 seconds to say a sentence like that, and it could literally avoid, hundreds of hours of work in the wrong direction and of course, a lot of costs associated with that. Bringing in different expertises it's a no brainer. It's a fun kickoff meeting typically, and it will really avoid a lot of trouble down the road.

**Dianne Wentworth:** Asmita, we wanna wrap up [00:10:00] here. What can you share with us the details of the safety week, the dates, and where else people can go to get information?

**Asmita Patel:** The dates are June 10th to 13th. And the information can be found on the ATAP website, [ATAP.lbl.gov/news](https://atap.lbl.gov/news). Multi-lab safety week 2025, and it should come up.

**Dianne Wentworth:** All right. Thank you both for joining us today. Appreciate it. Good luck. Have a good, great, safe, safety week.