**PPE culture wars**

*By Dave Johnson, Dave Johnson’s Writing Shop, former chief editor, Industrial Safety & Hygiene News magazine*

Imagine a workplace riven by two conflicting cultures when it comes to safety and health.

One group of employees resists and protests wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).

The second group is compliant and consistently wears PPE.

PPE enforcement in this workplace is sporadic, you could say. Inconsistent. Sometimes workers are confronted about not wearing PPE. Other times, nothing is said or done.

And the big boss upstairs, when he appears on the shop floor, shuns PPE.

The PPE resistors argue the threat of risk is overblown, the safety officers are overly cautious, the rules are too strict, and they want to be left alone. No top down command and control. They’ll take their chances.

The PPE compliant are less risk tolerant. They don’t mind the rules. They wear PPE because they are concerned for their own safety, and they want their co-workers in PPE so no one gets hurt or sick.

The PPE compliant are frustrated, angry at the resistors. They argue the resistors create an unsafe environment and are selfish. And they wish the big boss modeled safety and wore PPE, instead of seemingly siding with the resistors.

The resistors argue the PPE crowd is made up of wussies, worry-warts, and miscalculate the true degree of danger.

Sometimes on the floor, members of the two cultures clash, getting to name-calling and arguments.

A house divided against itself cannot stand.

What’s a safety professional to do? She or he can bring about no consensus, no meeting of the minds. The workplace is polarized.

There is no sense of community. No shared values. And existing regulatory guidance is largely voluntary. (Imagine in this work world no OSHA mandates and laisse-faire supervision).

Who would ever believe PPE could be this controversial?

All I need to do is walk the streets of Philadelphia to be reminded.