**Week 4: You Decide**

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**Week 4: You Decide – Wooden**

Given the available information in the case study, my initial response to the coworkers concern would not be to agree with them, or report the issue to OSHA. If you have been with a company for as long as 10 years, you are used to the working conditions, and how management operates. This would make it extremely easy to assume that the new coworker was exaggerating the situation due to an experience in her hometown.

However, after hearing the various responses from people that were in decision-making positions, I would have to seriously consider the possibility, and would probably check with other coworkers that had been with the company longer to see what their impression of the current factory conditions were.

The response from the owner is extremely corporate, and shows no concern for the safety of his employees. In fact, his response could very easily be seen as a corporate threat that there will be dire negative consequences to any employee that reports the company. It also gives the clear impression that the CEO is not willing to take any actions on his own, unless there is “Proof” of a safety issue, and that he has no intention of even looking into the possibility of a safety issue.

The area mangers response while not as corporate, as the CEO’s response, is still unsettling. This is because he is dismissing the issue with his “30 years” experience compared to someone else that only has 10 years of experience. In my experience after working for the same company for 2+ years, the majority of competent employees will understand what is “status quo” and in general, what is “safe”.

One would hope that surely the “Safety Coordinator” would be more open-minded, however his statement about “Wood dust not being explosive”, when it has been proven to be explosive, shows a serious lack of competence for someone in that position.

Sadly, as I continue to think about the situation, especially in today’s economy, in this case, I don’t think that I would report the issue. If only because the company in question is the largest company in town employing most of its residents, finding another job would be extremely difficult, even when you consider how difficult finding work currently is.

Being able to provide for yourself, and for your family sometimes means that you take risks, and as I had already been working in those work conditions for 10 years, the risks were obviously acceptable before this issue was brought up, so they are most likely still acceptable.

I would inform the co-worker that approached me with the issue, of what each of the people that I had talked to had said, and that I wasn’t any more safe due to seniority, than she was at risk due to lack of seniority, and that if this is truly an issue for her, she should report the issue herself. I would also offer to help her make sure that she knew how to properly clean her work area, so that at least the space she was working in was as safe as possible.

This approach is definitely not a utilitarian approach, but it is the safest approach for maintaining employment.

Of course another option to consider outside of whistle blowing, would be to document and sign an internal petition. If enough employees were willing to sign the petition requesting that management do something about the dust conditions, it might be enough to get them to look at it from a different angle. The case study says that employees had complained in the past, but if those complaints were similar situations of solitary complaints, or extremely small groups, then the responses were probably the same, and brushed off by management as insignificant.

As for the possibilities of consequences for failing to report the situation, or reporting the situation, in reporting the incident, the consequences are quite clear. Being loathed and scorned by management to the extent that they want you fired, and will more than likely go to great lengths to find the smallest reason possible that will allow them do so.

As for not reporting the situation, you are accepting the fact that there is nothing that you can do to change the situation that would not end badly for yourself, and are willing to take the risks that come with your working environment. These risks are more than likely the same risks as the past 10 years.

Under the scenario that you have reported the workplace condition, I believe that this would definitely qualify as a case of whistle blowing. Employee lives can be legitimately seen as at risk due to unsafe work conditions, and it would affect the company legally and financially, especially if the case was proven, and the company was forced to close for cleaning, and mandated to adopt cleaning policies that would permanently increase company costs.

Would a person be morally justified in this situation? Absolutely, the company is responsible for providing as safe a working environment as possible for its employees, and unless the employees are signing hazardous work contracts that include employer negligence upon being hired, then the employer is violating a trust that all employees expect from their place of employment.