How to Properly Refuse Risk

Every individual has the right and obligation to report safety problems and contribute ideas regarding their safety. Supervisors are expected to give these concerns and ideas serious consideration.

When an individual feels an assignment is unsafe, they also have the obligation to identify, to the degree possible, safe alternatives for completing that assignment. Turning down an assignment is one possible outcome of managing risk.

A turn down is a situation where an individual has determined they cannot undertake an assignment as given and they are unable to negotiate an alternative solution.

The turn down of an assignment must be based on an assessment of risks and the ability of the individual or organization to control those risks.

Individuals may turn down an assignment as unsafe when:

• There is a violation of safe work practices.
• Environmental conditions make the work unsafe.
• They lack the necessary qualifications or experience.
• Defective equipment is being used.

Steps to Follow When Turning Down Risk:

- The individual directly informs their supervisor they are turning down the assignment as given. Use the criteria outlined in the Risk Management Process (10 Standard Firefighting Orders, 18 Watch Out Situations, etc.) to document the turn down.

- The supervisor notifies the Safety Officer immediately upon being informed of the turn down. If there is no Safety Officer, the appropriate Section Chief or the IC should be notified. This provides accountability for decisions and initiates communication of safety concerns within the incident organization.

- If the supervisor asks another resource to perform the assignment, they are responsible to inform the new resource that the assignment was turned down and the reasons why it was turned down.

- If an unresolved safety hazard exists or an unsafe act was committed, the individual should also document the turn down by submitting a SAFENET (ground hazard) or SAFECOM (aviation hazard) form in a timely manner.

These actions do not stop an operation from being carried out. This protocol is integral to the effective management of risk as it provides timely identification of hazards to the chain of command, raises risk awareness for both leaders and subordinates, and promotes accountability.