



Anti-Safety Lilliputians

In 1726, Jonathan Swift wrote a novel about *Gulliver's Travels*. The story of Gulliver's first voyage describes the goals and mindset of the Lilliputians as they attempted to tie down and restrict technical advances known to larger and superior individuals. The story is a satire about how the real world's progress is hampered by mental lightweights who object to better ways of doing things.

Specialists in design-based system safety are vulnerable to "Lilliputians" who are out of touch with technology and engage a biased media in attempting to stop the use of reliable design-based safety.

For years, defendants who failed to adopt reliable safe-design standards have been sued by injured plaintiffs in third-party liability lawsuits who hire "Lilliputians" as defense witnesses. The task of these experts is to provide "testimony" that defines available design-based lifesaving safety features as "unsafe." Early on, these modern-day Lilliputians objected to devices such as tractor and mobile construction equipment rollover protective structures (ROPS) and other safety accessories, including back-up alarms and high-voltage power line warning devices for boomed equipment. The list includes a variety of equipment with sensors that will detect hazardous conditions and circumstances.

In today's world, many Lilliputians do not understand the safety engineering technology that can overcome hazards. They fail to grasp that more and more unsafe machines that will likely cause user injuries or even death are in the marketplace. Lilliputians are unable to comprehend the benefits of design-based safety, as they fail to understand that eliminating hazards by design reduces the need to regulate the workplace with voluminous safe work practices.

Traditionally, government agencies like to maintain control of the services they provide. As an example, our government air traffic control system is in chaos because commercial airlines and those with privately owned aircraft are unable to obtain federal funding

from Congress that would provide a state-of-the-art safe air traffic control system. A proposal to form a cooperative, owned by the airline industry and private aircraft owners that would charge a fee included in passenger ticket sales or via a service charge placed on filed flight plans for privately owned aircraft, could fund a progressive air traffic control system. These government Lilliputians want to preserve their empire and seek to prevent progress by holding the Federal Aviation Authority hostage with useless bureaucratic management that ties down activity and prevents the development of a new, self-funding organization.

It is amazing that nearly 300 years ago, the author Jonathan Swift humorously portrayed how sore losers are such small-minded people. Gulliver washed up on the beach and was tied down to the ground while he lay unconscious so he could not move. When Gulliver awoke, the Lilliputian king hatefully lectured him on his authority. In today's world, there are many small-minded people who try to prevent design-based safety from being a reality. In many circumstances, our current national politics portray the same syndrome. Gulliver protected the Lilliputians by building a boat, preventing an invasion of enemies from a nearby island. He also put out a fire by unconventional means, and finally just took his boat and sailed away.

The great lesson learned about design-based safety is that it is not worth the time to argue with small-minded people. Progress with machines that safely do our work will always be accepted by those in the business community, who see the profits to be made and a better life for those who learn to adopt the skills to develop reliable and safer automated machines.

Jonathan Swift understood human nature and taught us how anti-design-based safety would raise strong objections. System safety specialists need to ensure that safe design is explained in lay terms to gain public support, bypassing the Lilliputians. ●