
SEE SOMETHING. DO SOMETHING. SAY SOMETHING.™

A Position Paper for the Evolution of the National Public Safety Standard

"The best decision you can make is the right decision. The second best decision is the wrong decision. The worst decision is no decision at all."

— Theodore Roosevelt

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than two decades, the national standard for public safety awareness has been encapsulated in a simple directive: 'See Something, Say Something.' Originating from the New York MTA and adopted nationally by the Department of Homeland Security following the September 11 attacks, this standard has served a vital purpose — it mobilized civilian observation and reporting as a tool of security.

However, this paper argues that the standard, as currently framed, is fundamentally incomplete. It asks individuals — both trained professionals and civilians — to be nothing more than passive observers who transfer responsibility to someone else. The critical missing component is ACTION.

This paper proposes a new national standard: **See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™** — a tiered, proportional, and universally applicable framework that demands a decision from every individual, calibrated to their training, authority, and personal safety.

The DO Something framework is not reckless. It is not suicidal. It is proportional. For a trained security professional, it means closing and securing a propped door before reporting it. For a civilian, it may mean asking 'May I help you?' when an unfamiliar face appears in a restricted space — or taking no physical action when doing so would be reckless, defaulting back to reporting. At every level, it demands one thing the current standard does not: a decision.

SECTION I: THE CURRENT STANDARD — ORIGINS, PURPOSE, AND LIMITATIONS

'See Something, Say Something' was first introduced by New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 2002 and subsequently adopted as a national campaign by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2010. The standard was designed primarily for the general public in mass transit environments — civilian observers with no special training, authority, or obligation to intervene.

The core premise is sound: public vigilance is a force multiplier for security. When citizens report suspicious activity, they extend the eyes and ears of law enforcement and security professionals. This is indisputable and valuable.

However, the standard suffers from a critical structural flaw:

- It was designed for civilians — yet it has become the de facto standard applied to trained security professionals as well.
- It frames security as a linear two-step: observe, then hand off. This eliminates the obligation — and in many cases the perceived authority — to take any action in between.
- It institutionalizes a culture of passive observation, inadvertently encouraging the bystander effect.
- It fails to account for proportional, low-risk corrective actions that trained and untrained individuals alike can and should take.

SECTION II: THE MISSING LINK — THE BYSTANDER EFFECT AND THE DECISION IMPERATIVE

Social psychologists first identified the bystander effect in the 1960s: the more people present at an emergency, the less likely any one individual is to help. The mechanism is diffusion of responsibility — the unconscious assumption that 'someone else will handle it.'

The current 'See Something, Say Something' standard, by removing the action step, effectively institutionalizes diffusion of responsibility at a national policy level. It tells every person — trained or untrained — that their role is observation and reporting only, and that the action belongs to someone else.

The Decision Imperative

President Theodore Roosevelt captured the philosophy that underpins this framework: 'The best decision you can make is the right decision. The second best decision is the wrong decision. The worst decision is no decision at all.'

Applied to public safety: An individual who sees a security gap and takes the right proportional action has made the best decision. An individual who sees a security gap and takes an imperfect but well-intentioned action has made the second best decision — and one from which systems and individuals can learn. But an individual who sees a security gap and does nothing — passing it to someone else — has made the worst decision of all.

'See Something, Say Something' formalizes the worst decision as the standard. **See Something. DO Something. Say Something.**™ demands better.

SECTION III: REAL-WORLD FAILURES — WHEN THE ACTION STEP IS MISSING

Case Study 1: The Silent Witness (MPD Patrol Operations)

During criminal investigations throughout a 27-year career with the Metropolitan Police Department, a consistent pattern emerged: witnesses would come forward after the fact to report that they had observed the suspect, noticed something was 'off,' but decided not to intervene or report it in real time. Their reasoning was invariably the same: 'I thought it was someone else's business. I didn't want to get involved.'

These witnesses had seen something. They had not said anything. And they had certainly not done anything. The result in many of these cases was a preventable crime that could have been interrupted had even one person taken a proportional action — a phone call, a question, a warning.

Case Study 2: The Propped Door (TLS Management Group — Director of Security Operations)

As Director of Security Operations overseeing 25+ contract security sites, a recurring incident type illustrated the failure of the passive reporting standard with perfect clarity. Security officers — and in some cases civilian employees — would report a propped-open secured door to command. When asked the natural follow-up question — 'Did you close and secure it?' — the answer was consistently no.

'Why didn't you close and secure it before reporting it to me?' The response was silence, followed by uncertainty. They had been trained — formally or culturally — to see and say. Nobody had told them their role included doing. They had been indoctrinated into a standard that removed the action step, and a propped door representing a live security vulnerability sat open while a report worked its way up the chain.

Both examples share a single root cause: a standard that has removed the action step from every individual's mental framework, replacing personal responsibility with institutional handoff.

SECTION IV: THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK



This framework replaces passive observation-and-report with an active, tiered model. The DO Something step is not a mandate for heroism — it is a mandate for proportional, safety-conscious engagement by every individual according to their training, authority, and the nature of the threat observed.

SECTION V: THE ACTION SPECTRUM — TIERS OF "DO SOMETHING"

LEVEL	THREAT TYPE	ACTION — PROFESSIONAL	ACTION — CIVILIAN
Level 1	Minor physical gap (properly identified)	Immediately look at the gap, then immediately look at the person(s) in the gap	Identify the gap and report. (Skill set: close door); report.
Level 2	Elevated threat indicator (Active emergency notice)	Activate emergency notice and restrict access to the area	Softly tell the person in the gap: "Excuse me, there's a problem here. Can you help me?" If they don't, report.
Level 3A	Active threat — trained professional	Physical intercept, containment, or engagement	Evacuate the area, place people at risk, and report.
Level 3B	Active threat — civilian (recessed door)	Default to See Something, SAY Something. Do not risk life.	

Note: At every level, the decision to act must be proportional to the individual's training, authority, and personal safety assessment. When in doubt, safety of the individual takes priority over action. The framework does not mandate reckless behavior — it mandates conscious decision-making.

SECTION VI: UNIVERSAL APPLICABILITY

The 'See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™' framework is designed for universal application — trained security professionals, law enforcement, civilian employees, and the general public alike. The standard is not uniform; it is proportional. The same three-step framework applies to everyone, but the definition of 'DO Something' scales with training, authority, and safety.

For Trained Security Professionals and Law Enforcement:

- Full application of all three tiers according to post orders, SOPs, and use-of-force policies.
- Duty to act is formalized — passive observation and reporting without corrective action represents a performance failure.
- The DO Something step is embedded in daily security operations: door checks, access control enforcement, behavioral threat assessment, patrol response.

For Civilians:

- Apply the DO Something step when action is safe, within personal skill set, and not reckless or suicidal.
- Recognize that even a verbal engagement ('May I help you?') or a simple physical correction (closing an unlocked door) constitutes meaningful action.
- When action is unsafe or beyond capability, revert to the baseline: see it and say something — immediately and specifically.

SECTION VII: ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL AND INDUSTRY STANDARDS

The 'See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™' framework aligns with and extends existing national and professional security standards:

- **ASIS International Standards:** The framework maps directly to the ASIS Protection of Assets framework, defense-in-depth principles, and the Threat × Vulnerability × Consequence model. The DO Something step activates the 'Response' layer of the Deter-Detect-Delay-Respond-Recover continuum.
- **NIMS/ICS:** The framework supports Incident Command System activation by empowering first observers to take initial corrective actions before command escalation.
- **DHS Active Threat and CPTED Frameworks:** The framework extends Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles by making physical environment corrections an individual responsibility, not solely a facility management function.

- **OSHA Duty of Care:** Trained security professionals have a heightened duty of care that extends beyond observation — the DO Something framework formalizes this duty in operational standards.

SECTION VIII: IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS

Adopting the 'See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™' standard requires deliberate integration into security training, post orders, and organizational culture:

- **Post Orders and SOPs:** Revise all post orders to include explicit DO Something protocols for each threat level applicable to the site. Officers must have clear written authority to take Level 1 corrective actions without command approval.
- **Security Awareness Training:** Replace passive reporting-only training with tiered action training that includes scenario-based exercises for each Action Spectrum level.
- **Behavioral Threat Assessment Programs:** Incorporate the DO Something framework into workplace violence prevention and active threat response programs.
- **Public Awareness Campaign:** The See-Do-Say Campaign should be positioned as an evolution — not a replacement — of the DHS See Something, Say Something campaign, extending it to include actionable guidance for both professionals and civilians.
- **Metrics and Accountability:** Security supervisors should track not only incidents reported, but corrective actions taken — closing the loop between observation and outcome.

SECTION IX: LEGAL AND LIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

A common barrier to the DO Something standard is fear of liability. Individuals — trained and untrained — often cite concern about legal consequences of taking action. This concern, while understandable, is addressable:

- **Good Samaritan Laws:** All 50 U.S. states have Good Samaritan statutes that provide legal protection to individuals acting in good faith to provide emergency assistance. These statutes protect proportional civilian intervention.
- **Post Orders as Legal Authority:** For trained security professionals, explicit post orders authorizing Level 1 and 2 corrective actions provide the legal authority and liability protection needed.
- **Proportionality:** The framework's explicit proportionality requirement — do nothing reckless or suicidal — limits liability exposure by anchoring civilian action to reasonable safety assessment.
- **Liability of Inaction:** Courts have increasingly found that trained security professionals have a duty to act. Passive observation and reporting without corrective action may itself create liability in certain contexts.

SECTION X: A CALL TO ACTION — THE SEE-DO-SAY CAMPAIGN™

The security landscape has changed dramatically since the original 'See Something, Say Something' standard was introduced. Threats are more complex, more frequent, and more distributed. The passive model of civilian observation and expert response is no longer adequate as the sole standard for either professionals or the public.

This paper calls on the following organizations and bodies to formally adopt, study, and champion the 'See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™' standard as the next evolution of the national public safety framework:

- **ASIS International** — Formal inclusion in the Protection of Assets standard and security awareness program curriculum
- **U.S. Department of Homeland Security / CISA** — Evolution of the national See Something, Say Something campaign to include the DO Something tier
- **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)** — Integration into TSO post orders and public-facing airport security awareness
- **Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)** — Curriculum development for tiered action response training
- **National Institute of Justice (NIJ)** — Research funding for behavioral and outcome studies on tiered civilian action models
- **U.S. Congress** — Legislative endorsement and public education funding for the See-Do-Say Campaign
- **Corporate Security Directors and IAHSS Members** — Immediate integration into institutional security post orders and employee training programs

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The time for no decision has passed. The time for the DO Something standard is now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony H. Washington, CPM, is a retired Lieutenant with the Metropolitan Police Department with 27 years of patrol service in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Over his distinguished law enforcement career, he developed expertise in Incident Command System operations, behavioral threat assessment, multi-agency operational coordination, and crisis management — skills directly aligned with the ASIS International CPP framework domains of Physical Security, Crisis Management, and Security Principles & Practices.

Following his retirement from law enforcement, Mr. Washington served as Director of Security Operations for TLS Management Group, overseeing physical asset protection programs, guard force management, and security operations across 25+ contract security sites in the Washington, DC area.

Mr. Washington is the Founder and CEO of A Washington Ventures LLC, a portfolio of security, technology, and community impact ventures including GuardianPath DC (an enterprise security management platform), LegacyShield Pro (family wealth protection education), Connect My Brother, Connect My Sister, and IronSquare. He is an active member of the Masonic fraternity, a certified public manager, and a committed advocate for community safety and public education in the District of Columbia.

The 'See Something. DO Something. Say Something.™' framework was developed from more than 27 years of direct law enforcement patrol experience, security operations management, and deep engagement with the communities this standard is designed to protect.

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