

Turn Off Tune In: Manchester Tower Votes 'No' On Distractions (11/02/2015)

When Steve Schmidt became the air traffic manager of New Hampshire's Manchester Tower (MHT) in January, he told the controllers that he'd like to have a phone charging station somewhere in the facility as a way to reduce electronic distractions in the operating environment.

The controllers' response: We already have one.

"It really seems to be part of the culture here to leave your phone outside of the control room and stay focused," Schmidt said. "This is how we do business. I'm really proud of the work done before I got here to make that happen."

The charging station, which was handcrafted by recently retired MHT controller and former FacRep Scott Chausee in his spare time, sits in the break room on the ninth floor. Hanging nearby are Turn Off Tune In posters to help further remind controllers to be cognizant of workplace distractions and the threats they present in daily operations.

The tower's FacRep, Jeff Carpentier, has played a big role in raising awareness about the risks of distractions and encouraging controllers to stay focused on the job. In addition to the charging station, Carpentier said they've shown videos produced by the Turn Off Tune In campaign at local union meetings.



Manchester Tower's charging station

"I think that helped open everybody's eyes and they realized the potential dangers," Carpentier said.

Carpentier pointed out the collaborative efforts between NATCA and management to fight distractions across the board. Schmidt said that it is now in the facility's Standard Operating Procedures for controllers and operations managers to keep personal electronic devices out of the control room.

Other potential distractions, including facility tours and non-work-related phone calls to the tower are managed so they don't become a distraction. Controllers and managers understand the need to work together to stay on task when these things occur.

"We don't want distractions in the tower, and Turn Off Tune In has helped us," Carpentier said. "Everyone here has come a long way and worked together in this."



Jeff Carpentier (left) posing in front of a TOTI poster with Steve Schmidt.