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## PREVENTING SAFETY NON-COMPLIANCE THROUGH A TEAM APPROACH

The single largest cause of safety non-compliance is inattention to safety details on the part of the individual worker. This inattention generally results from the repetitive nature of most work performed by the worker and the natural comfort that comes from repetitive action. Even for the experienced worker, such comfort is false at best, as each new project and each new day on the same project bring different challenges. The best way to combat laxity which comes with repetitive action is through constant daily reminders about safety through a team approach. Following is a basic outline of daily safety meetings and suggestions for project safety and a demonstration of how they will help prevent on-the-job injury.

### Preconstruction Planning and Cost to Industry

For success and safety, this team approach is developed and implemented on a daily basis through the general contractor or construction manager on the project. In this regard, successful general contractors share a common approach to safety that works—daily meetings with the workforce to remind them of the need for safety, the need for a team approach to safety and to address particular safety concerns related to the work to be performed that day. Such statements and advice seem so basic, but are rarely executed perfectly and in such case, accidents will, and do, occur.

Why should this matter to the owner, contractor or subcontractor? The legal implications of safety

non-compliance are borne out in OSHA requirements and penalties, civil lawsuits that arise from accidents and other problems. In addition, safety non-compliance results in lost productivity, scheduling problems and in the worst case scenario, a media nightmare (e.g., “The Big Dig” settlement).

Work-related injuries and lost work-days cost the construction industry billions of dollars on an annual basis. While sick days from the common office environment are costly, injuries and damage on a construction project affect not only the worker or trade at issue, but all aspects of the project at hand. As with any other costs involved in construction, prudent owners and contractors should not ignore the significant costs arising from such injury and lost productivity.

The best way to address this is through a team approach which begins at the earliest stages of the project and continues until all materials are removed. The approach to safety and team organization begins, in large part, prior to the first dirt being moved during the review of documents and choice of project delivery methods.

The design of the project and choice of technology to reach the desired result will largely drive the safety measures that need to be in place on any given project. Next, and often overlooked or minimized during bid evaluation, is pre-qualification of contractors and sub-contractors with regard to safety. This may start with review of past work and reputation, but can also be accomplished through

careful review of the bids submitted to determine whether adequate time for safety and training are provided for the scheduled work and whether the contractor has sufficient manpower and the ability to adequately train and transition new trades on an active job site. Finally, after all of this planning and review, the rubber truly meets the road during the onsite application of this team approach.

### Daily Meetings and Training Bridge the Gap

The amount of coordination that is required for a successful and safe construction project requires not only daily reminders among a trade group, but site-wide instruction on the use of new tools, the ever-changing project schedule and the work to be

performed that day. OSHA requirements and construction industry standards are a helpful guide in this regard, but practical realities demand that truly successful general contractors insist upon even higher standards and review the "standards" as they apply to the particular project realities. Pre-planning and reviewing the contract documents can help to ensure that proper personal protective equipment is in place and is managed in an efficient manner. The prudent owner, construction manager or general contractor will always ensure that these activities are thought out in advance. The cost of purchasing proper personal protective equipment for each phase of the project is miniscule when compared with the costs of delays, lawsuits and OSHA violations.

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## ■■■ Risky Business

Similarly, to decrease the false sense of security in workers, each new activity and phase of a project requires new training and on-the-job site demonstration. This means that at the beginning of work involving new tools, or different types of tools, new training is required. Personal protective equipment, as required by OSHA, is only helpful if a worker is using a tool properly in the first place. For instance, safety goggles will not prevent an accident when a grinding tool that is designed for 300 rpm's is used with a spinning wheel designed to rotate at only 150 rpm's. The spinning wheel that is improperly sized and rotating well in excess of designed speeds will disintegrate and damage the worker's face and eyes.

Many owners and general contractors take for granted that the different trades are skilled and should understand these issues without further instruction. However, the practical realities of the modern construction environment with language barriers, documentation issues and the pressing demand to "get the job done" result in workers of varying skill and experience levels on the same jobsite, placing not only their own safety, but the safety of others, at risk.

Therefore, after the workers have received the proper safety training on the new equipment and/or activity, they should receive a safety sticker to place on their hard hat. It is imperative that all project superintendents themselves are aware of the safety stickers required for each new activity and that the workers have adequate personal protective equipment in place and properly functioning. If a worker does not have the required sticker, they should not be allowed to work. If a worker does not have the appropriate personal protective equipment in place and functioning properly, they

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should not be allowed to work. If for instance, a worker is dealing with steel and working and moving the same, they may be required to have "appropriate footwear" under some industry standard. In some cases, this may not actually require "steel-toed boots," but the prudent general contractor would require the same, as any tool or other equipment used in conjunction with the steel itself, or the steel, could easily break a worker's foot or toes.

How do successful owners and general contractors deal with the language barrier that is present on today's project? The answer is through coordination and direct involvement in day-to-day training, meetings and demonstrations. First, the general contractor should ensure that there are a sufficient number of multi-lingual workers in attendance at each safety meeting. These multilingual workers should demonstrate the proper use of tools, safety equipment and other jobsite requirements to the workers in their primary language. It is imperative that actual demonstrations of the work, use of the tool or proper use of the personal protective equipment be demonstrated both visually and translated in the worker's primary language.

Finally, coordination between the different trades and suppliers on a jobsite where the only thing that remains the same is "change," requires that the general contractor ensure that all of these activities are properly documented on a daily basis.

How do the above guidelines

practically apply to contractors and owners in today's construction environment? The following real life example demonstrates how the above standards would have helped to prevent the ultimate result.

### Concept Application to Reality: Preventing Onsite Injury

A young project manager with less than a year of experience, is in charge of ensuring training on safety issues for the day's work on a large construction project. Part of his job is to ensure that all workers report to the trailer to receive instruction on proper uses of personal protective equipment and general jobsite safety. No new worker is supposed to begin work on the project until receiving this training. At 7:30AM, a new Hispanic worker arrives on the job site and proceeds to the training trailer. The meeting began at 7:15AM, and, as he is late, he is nervous about receiving training and losing time on the job. The young project manager tells him to come back at 8:15AM for the next training session. The young project manager assumes the new worker understands he cannot work during this downtime.

At 7:40AM the new worker, confused and worried about losing hours, sees a friend he knows and follows him to work on moving equipment to a new phase of the project. The new worker is eager to begin work, but has not received any safety stickers and is wearing acceptable "work boots," without steel toes. The on-site

superintendent stops the worker and asks whether he has had the appropriate training. The worker, not completely understanding the question, nods and points at the trailer where training is held. Assuming he simply forgot the sticker, having no other multi-lingual worker present and with his crew already behind schedule, the superintendent allows the new worker to proceed in moving the equipment.

Within an hour, the new worker has a broken foot, the young project manager in charge of safety training is being chewed out and the project superintendent is being questioned as well.

This example actually happened and all of the basic guidelines above would have helped to prevent it. The individual worker in each instance had the right thoughts in mind, but each failed to meet the safety standards that need to be in place. This

example demonstrates how simple and sound procedures, which seem self-explanatory, can prevent larger problems when strictly followed.

Had the young project manager had sufficient multi-lingual support or adequate training facilities, the new worker may not have wandered off. Had the superintendent required proper safety stickers or looked into whether the new worker had received training, the accident would not have happened. Had the general contractor gone above the standard of sufficient footwear and required steel toed boots, the new worker's foot may not have been injured to the same degree.

Successful owners and general contractors will strive to reach beyond the OSHA requirements and industry standards for personal protective equipment and planning purposes early in the project. They will further

ensure that safety procedures are implemented on a day-in and day-out basis, requiring daily meetings and properly documenting the same. In the end, strict compliance with a structured plan, centered on daily training and coordination on each new phase of the project, among the trades will help to prevent the individual worker from causing a much larger problem, both for himself and the project in general. ■

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