13 Ways to Improve Construction Worker Safety



The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) recently recommended that commercial construction firms in the US act on 13 specific steps to further improve workplace safety. The recommendations are based on an in-depth analysis of effective safety programs.

Although intended for the construction industry in the US, these recommendations also have value in other industry sectors and in Canada.

NEW WORKERS

1. **Establish a buddy system (or mentor program) for all new hires:**

   - During orientation, assign experienced workers to serve as a new hire's safety sponsor.
   - After 30 days, the sponsor and supervisor evaluate the new hire's application of training and understanding of how to perform assigned tasks safely
   - Both must sign off that the new worker is ready to work safely without a buddy or the buddy process continues until he has proven he can work safely.

2. Hold safety orientations for all new hires, including temporary workers:

   - Require every new hire'whether full time, permanent,

part time, temporary and/or labor-firm staff'to complete a safety orientation system before being allowed to work on a project. This orientation should be separate and independent from the general administrative orientation.

- The orientation system includes photos depicting common and not-so-common (lightning, weather) hazards on projects that trainees are quizzed to recognize.
- The orientation includes interactive hazard recognition and group discussion on controls.
- The orientation process covers company policies, procedures and principles covering work rules and conduct.
- The orientation includes a verification of competency in the skill or craft the worker was hired to perform.

ONGOING TRAINING

3. Ensure managers and supervisors have the appropriate leadership and effective communication skills critical to instill safety culture and concepts into the workforce.

All personnel in supervisory or managerial positions must complete initial management training so they can learn effective leadership and communication skills. This training and continuing leadership education should be an essential element of individual development plans for those in leadership positions.

4. Institute two separate pre-task hazard analysis training programs.

Create distinct pre-task hazard analysis training programs: one for the crew and one specifically designed for 1st line supervision. These programs will help workers operate safely and train supervisors to effectively fulfill their obligation to ensure workers are operating safely at all times.

5. Hold monthly lunch and learn safety training programs.

Organize and host monthly safety lunch-and-learns. Include 30-minute presentations from craft workers on pre-determined safety topics.

6. **Require all foremen and/or superintendents to attend leadership in safety excellence certification courses.**

Project leaders such as foremen and superintendents are critical to the success of the day-to-day performance and implementation of a company's safety program. Providing them with the necessary skills to effectively communicate the mission is key to this success.

7. Hold targeted safety training to address all safety incidents.

- Identify safety incidents and details.
- Quickly follow up by communicating targeted messages designed to address specific safety hazards involved to avoid similar future incidents. The message can be communicated in bulletins, e-mail, team meetings, formal training or other appropriate forums.

8. Make sure all training and materials are in the language of the entire workforce.

Workforces may include workers with limited English skills. So offer safety training in English and other languages as the need arises, to ensure understanding by *all* workers.

9. Train your trainers.

- Training others requires effective communication and training skills. So provide 'Train the Trainer' instruction to all personnel responsible for training others to help improve the effectiveness of the safety training provided.
- Retaining 'science of teaching' consultants to train the trainers on basic instructional skills and/or retained

to develop a program implemented in-house can greatly improve the Train the Trainer programs.
- Professional trainer certification and credentialing through OSHA and BCSP ensure adequate rigor in trainer education.

OPERATING PROCEDURES

10. Create worker task-specific 'pocket safety guides' for every task they're assigned.

- Laborers may get just one guide for the scope of their task; others, such as equipment operators, may get several pocket guides.
- Guides must be kept on workers' persons and produced upon request by supervisor.
- Workers are required to verbally explain the safe way to do their key assigned tasks.
- During morning meetings, workers are called upon to lead the meeting using their pocket guide.

11. Establish craft-specific safety mentoring programs.

Schedule monthly mentorship meetings where crafts of varying tenure meet to help each other understand and discuss safety-related procedures, processes and lessons learned. At the end of these meetings, the craft workers will summarize the results and share them with senior management to identify areas that may require additional focus.

12. Issue easy-to-read badges to all workers indicated their level of training.

- Issue easy-to-read badges (such as badges that use QR codes or color coding) that identify each worker's level of training and certification for operating equipment.
- Badgers are issued to every worker on a project, regardless of whether they work for a general contractor or a subcontractor.

- Badges allow everyone on a project to be aware of every worker’s training and certification level so they can be assigned appropriate tasks.

13. Authorize all workers to issue stop work cards to address safety risks.

- Issue all workers a ‘Stop Work Card’ and instruct them that they can use these cards to temporarily halt construction activity on a project if they identify a legitimate safety hazard.
- Make it clear to all workers there are no repercussions for using the ‘Stop Work Cards.’