

Ensuring a Safe and Compliant Project

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A 2015 report from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) entitled "Adding Inequality to Injury: The Costs of Failing to Protect Workers on the Job," demonstrates that there is still much work to be done in the construction industry to prevent injuries. The report shares statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicating that 4,500 people still lose their lives while on the job and an estimated three million serious work-related injuries and illnesses occur annually. Considering injuries and illnesses are likely underreported in many segments, and their related workers' compensation costs, these statistics should raise a red flag for all business owners.

The shifting demographics of the workforce are labeled as a primary contributing factor to these still-problematic statistics. According to the latest figures from BLS, the construction industry has added more than 300,000 jobs in the past 12 months. This growth has prompted OSHA to be explicit that employers must abate occupational hazards that coincide with the use of multiple contractors. These safety issues must be addressed proactively.

Step 1: Design in Safety

A formalized planning process agreed to by the contractors provides guidance related to preplanning and daily objectives for safety. The plan should include items such as project safety plans and task-specific hazard analyses for high-risk and new tasks. It is also paramount to obtain managerial buy-in with regard to the importance of



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safety in general, as well as the specific steps needed to achieve a safe working environment. Developing site-specific plans should begin about three to four weeks prior to the start of the project.

Step 2: Utilize a Safety Management System

A focused safety management system with key components will reduce the risk of environmental incidents, occupational injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. Common areas include demonstrated management commitment, effective planning, education, staffing, fitness for duty, incident investigations, worker involvement, and subcontractor management. The development of a uniform management system is critical when multiple contractors are on a project site.

Step 3: The Job Safety Analysis

Following the development of project-specific safety procedures, it is equally important that each job within the larger project be reviewed prior to start and again daily during project activities. The goal of the overall safety process is to recognize and eliminate

hazards that may lead to employee injuries. It also provides a checklist for the proper safety equipment, tools, and procedures to be used. Analyses should be performed:

- Following any prolonged break in the task;
- Any time there is a change from the original plan;
- Any time new members join the work crew;
- Following any unintended incident (e.g., equipment failure).

Frequent spot checks not only ensure that the task is going as planned, they also facilitate structured conversation ensuring that the commitment to safe working conditions and processes is consistent.

Step 4: Report, Investigate, and Manage

A comprehensive internal process for reporting, investigating, managing, and classifying injuries is critical to proper incident management. To ensure the safety and security of their employees, companies must establish a procedure that clearly defines roles and expectations. Working in a fluid environment, there are more opportunities for an incident, but a properly trained staff can prevent an incident that can jeopardize an entire project.

Final Thoughts

It is estimated that OSHA has prevented thousands of fatalities and injuries, and the respective rates declined nearly 70 percent. Performing these four steps will help prevent injuries and fatalities when employing contractors and will be considered "value added" to your project. **CP**