

Risk Control

Construction Safety: Communicating the Message

Introduction

People in construction who think safety is only about wearing safety glasses or donning a hard-hat often minimize how important it really is. Safety is more than that. It's about controlling losses: loss of time, production, profits, and in a worse case scenario, loss of life. To control these losses, construction companies must effectively communicate safety expectations to their workforce.

The following can help contractors develop effective communication tools to get their safety messages across to workers. It concentrates on six areas: pre-work meetings, toolbox talks, incident updates, near-miss updates, fatal facts and safety manual reviews.

Pre-work meetings

Pre-work meetings address daily activities and hazards workers may encounter that day. Pre-work meetings will also help heighten workers' safety awareness and are a constant reminder of your company's commitment to safety.

These meetings do not have to be long. Between five and 10 minutes is often enough time to address safety issues (if any) from the previous day as well as all potential hazards for the day's work. Crew involvement is critical as these are the people on the front line who are familiar with the work environment.

Toolbox talks

Many companies conduct toolbox talks, sometimes referred to as supervisor talks. These are usually scheduled once a week or every two weeks. The topics are normally predetermined by management and may not be related to job site activities at the time, but meant to educate workers. If the company's policy is to conduct toolbox talks, then make them as effective as possible by:

- Relating the topic to a specific condition or hazard on the job.
- Demonstrating the safe practice or procedure, using actual personal protective equipment, tools and/or equipment if applicable.
- Encourage discussion by soliciting input from workers.

In addition to the mandatory topics, address safety-related issues specific to your particular job site. Use daily logs to record safety issues and talk about them at the weekly meetings. However, if a situation presents an immediate danger to workers or the job site, then it must be discussed immediately.

Incident/accident updates

Often incidents will happen on one job site but not be communicated to workers throughout the company. A company-wide bulletin or newsletter can explain how and why an incident happened and the lessons learned from the mishap in hopes of preventing a similar incident.

Risk Control

Near-miss updates

These are just as important as incident updates. Near misses indicate that there is a problem with a specific procedure, piece of equipment or unsafe work practice. Management must investigate near misses and include them in a weekly bulletin or newsletter so repeat at-risk behavior, which could result in an incident, is eliminated.

Fatal facts

Information about a fatal accident at another company’s construction project reinforces the need to work safely and points out best practices to help avoid a similar fate at one of your job sites. OSHA has a Fatal Facts Web site with information about fatalities that happened during activities that are similar to work being done at your company.

Safety manual review

This will help determine how well versed your workers are in the company’s safety policies and procedures. During supervisor meetings, have your staff bring in their safety manual and choose a topic to review. Reviewing these topics is a good training tool for supervisors. You can make it interesting by choosing a topic for the next meeting and then randomly selecting an employee to discuss the topic. This will ensure that all workers show up to the meeting prepared. When out on job sites, test your crew’s knowledge of the employee handbook or code of safe practices. Their ability to answer questions will help determine how well the safety message is being communicated in the field.

Summary

Good communication is key to any relationship. Re-establish your safety relationship with your employees by communicating the safety message. It will go a long way in preventing losses.

References

Occupational Hazards, *Construction a Successful Message*, by Todd Nighswonger
OSHA’s “Fatal Facts”: http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/toc_FatalFacts.html

For more information, visit our Web site at travelers.com/riskcontrol, contact your Risk Control consultant or email Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com.



The Travelers Indemnity Company
and its property casualty affiliates
One Tower Square
Hartford, CT 06183

.....
The information provided in this document is intended for use as a guideline and is not intended as, nor does it constitute, legal or professional advice. Travelers does not warrant that adherence to, or compliance with, any recommendations, best practices, checklists, or guidelines will result in a particular outcome. In no event will Travelers or any of its subsidiaries or affiliates be liable in tort or in contract to anyone who has access to or uses this information. Travelers does not warrant that the information in this document constitutes a complete and finite list of each and every item or procedure related to the topics or issues referenced herein. Furthermore, federal, state or local laws, regulations, standards or codes may change from time to time and the reader should always refer to the most current requirements. This material does not amend, or otherwise affect, the provisions or coverages of any insurance policy or bond issued by Travelers, nor is it a representation that coverage does or does not exist for any particular claim or loss under any such policy or bond. Coverage depends on the facts and circumstances involved in the claim or loss, all applicable policy or bond provisions, and any applicable law.