

Starting a Safety Program

When it comes to safety, a little training goes a long way

If you think safety planning is a waste of time, think again. Companies with effective safety programs have less employee turnover, lower insurance costs, and fewer problems with OSHA.

Your safety plan has to be customized for your company. But here are a few tips on setting one up.

Identify the Risks

A 1992 study showed that 90% of construction fatalities come down to four basic causes:

- Falling
- Getting struck by something
- Getting caught in or between things, including cave-ins
- Getting electrocuted

Look over your operation with an eye for these four hazards, and identify the riskiest activities in what you do. If you're a roofer, give special attention to fall hazards; if you pour foundations, take note of cave-in hazards. Also look at the biggest nonfatal risks. Expensive back injuries, for instance, and common injuries like debris flying into the eyes, are easily preventable.

Cut Down the Risk

Do everything you can in advance to control and avoid risks. For example:

- Stick to your area of experience. Stay away from jobs that involve risks you aren't used to.
- Keep the site clean to reduce tripping hazards.
- Inspect and maintain equipment. Fix stuck guards or damaged wires on tools now, not later.

Work Safer

You can reduce or eliminate some risks by setting up safer work procedures.

- Train employees, especially new people. Before

you ask them to use a tool or build a staging, make sure they know what they're doing.

- On risky operations, such as roof framing or very heavy lifting, make sure a capable person is in charge, and that everyone knows who it is.

Provide Protection

Construction is always going to be risky. For unavoidable risks, provide protection:

- Railings around scaffolds and stair openings are a cheap way to prevent crippling or fatal falls.
- Grounded tools and GFCIs have prevented many electrocutions.
- Simple items like good boots, gloves, and safety goggles can prevent minor injuries that cost your employees work time and cost you insurance dollars.

Carry It Through

Your employees won't take safety seriously unless you do. Don't just make rules: Follow through.

- Spend a little of your own time on safety. If your crew takes ten minutes at the end of the day to clean up, you or your foreman could also use that time to do a quick safety walk-through. Jot down any problems and fix them.
- At paycheck time, you've got everyone's attention. Use that moment to have a short discussion on a safety topic, like electrical protection or eye safety.
- Monitor job-site conditions and enforce safety. Correct unsafe practices on the spot. If an employee doesn't heed warnings, send him or her down the road — the person he or she injures could be you. ■

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