# Effective safety and health programs protect your employees and business.



As a business owner and/or leader of a construction company, qualified workers are one of your most critical assets to operating a successful business. Implementing a safety and health program for your workplace and on the jobsite is an effective way to ensure these workers are not sidelined by injuries or illness.

Employee injuries (even short term) impact the bottom line beyond just the direct cost of the accident. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) estimates that employers nationally pay almost $1 billion per week for worker's compensation costs alone. When adding in the other associated costs of workplace accidents (lost productivity, temporary labor, damaged materials or equipment, job delays, turnover, lower moral and reputation), the importance and value of a robust workplace safety and health program becomes clear.

This document outlines the basic elements needed for an effective safety and health program in construction to assist you with the reduction of workplace injuries and cost associated with them.

Once implemented, a proactive safety and health program will:

■ Evaluate and correct workplace/jobsite hazards before a loss.

■ Create a culture of prevention and solutions.

■ Foster trust with employees.

■ Lead to business improvements.

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### Basic #1 – Demonstrate that Safety and Health is a Core Value

Management/leadership must demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvements and make worker safety a core value of the organization. This is shown by providing the time and financial resources to eliminate workplace hazards through written safety policies, formal communication/training, establishing safety goals, providing support/oversight and leading by example. It is in everyone's best interest to engage employees and request feedback about the effectiveness of the safety and health programs in the workplace.

### Basic #2 - Employee Involvement in All Aspects of Workplace Safety

Workers must be involved and engaged in all aspects of safety to ensure total company commitment. Management and employee safety and health communications are critical elements to success. In fact, employers are required (per OSHA) to provide employees access to information (Safety Data Sheets, OSHA Injury Logs, Incident Reports, Safety Policies and Workplace Safety Training). Leadership should encourage and empower workers and competent persons to report hazards/health concerns and/or address workplace hazards. A competent person is defined by OSHA as "one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them". Workers are better positioned to identify safety concerns and program inadequacies. Implement a simple process for reporting incidents/injuries, near misses, hazards and other concerns.

### Basic #3 - Hazard Identification and Assessment:

A leading cause of workplace injuries is failure to identify hazards on the construction site. There are many unanticipated hazards on construction sites due to nature of construction (working around many trades), changes in the project and a fast-paced environment. A critical element of any effective safety and health program is proactive and ongoing processes to identify and assess hazards. There are many resources that should be utilized to collect information to identify and address workplace hazards. These resources include (not limited to) – initial and periodic workplace inspection, investigation of injuries/illnesses/near misses for trends, company policies, safety data sheets, input from workers and the end results from Job Hazard Analysis (JHA). JHA is defined as a technique that focuses on job tasks as a way to identify hazards before they occur. It centers on the relationship between the worker, the task, the tools, and the work environment. Ideally, after you identify uncontrolled hazards, you will take steps to eliminate or reduce them to an acceptable risk level. Implementing proactive measures to identify, assess and eliminate hazards is a winning combination to reducing workplace incidents/injuries.

## Basic #4 - Hazard Prevention and Control:

Once a hazard has been identified in the workplace/jobsite then controls must be implemented. Effective controls protect workers from hazards, help avoid injuries/incidents and minimize risk. Employers should select the controls that are most feasible, effective and permanent.

Controls must be selected according to a hierarchy to emphasize engineering solutions (including elimination or substitution) first, followed by safe work practices, administrative controls, and finally personal protective equipment.

## Basic #5 - Training:

Training is a critical tool for educating workers and management about hazard identification and control, industry standards/requirements and company-wide policies. Provide training to all managers, supervisors, workers, subcontractors regarding the following (not limited to) – company-wide safety and health policies, their specific roles, industry requirements, emergency contact information, incident reporting and emergency actions plans. Additional training is required when employees don't follow company policies or post-incident. Also, ensure that training is formally documented and provided in language and literacy levels appropriate for the workers.

## Basic #6 - Program Evaluation and Improvement:

Safety and health programs are always a work in progress. Programs must be evaluated upon initial implementation, annually and upon changes in the workplace (new equipment, hazards and/or controls). Follow-up procedures must be implemented to collect, analyze and review the performance and progress of the programs. Engage management and workers to solicit their feedback regarding deficiencies in the programs and make needed corrections.

Following these six basic guidelines will help reduce workplace incidents and losses related to workers compensation claims. As the construction industry changes and skilled workers become harder and harder to hire, these basic principles and proactive measures of safety health programs will become critical toward operating a successful construction business.

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