

The Value of a Safety-Conscious Builder

Safety Programs encourage a healthy workforce.

By Joanne Ray with contributions from Jerry Kingwill, principal of Cobb Hill Construction, Inc.

With safety being the No. 1 concern on job sites these days, it has become increasingly important to hire a builder who has implemented an extensive health and safety program.

Due to the down economic environment, some business owners tend to shy away from investing in new safety programs. The reality is that hiring a builder that is not cognizant of safety standards and regulations can be extremely costly to a company.

In a recent study, The American Society of Safety Engineers found that for every \$1 spent on a quality safety and health program, businesses saved \$8. Even in these difficult times, safety is both responsible and profitable. Choosing a company that has instilled safety measurements is a socially responsible and financially sound decision.

There are many resources for builders that understand the importance of health and safety programs in the construction industry. The most commonly referenced organization, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, also known as OSHA, is part of the U.S. Department of Labor.

OSHA focuses on preventing work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths by issuing and enforcing standards for workplace safety and health. Many construction companies have partnerships with OSHA to ensure proper standards for their employees.

According to OSHA, an estimated 1.6 million Americans are employed in the construction industry. Each year, roughly 38,000 construction injuries are reported, with approximately 21,000 associated days of lost work.



J. Masterson's crew wears safety equipment while paving in Wilmington, MA.



Ted Dickinson (roof) and Mike White (ladder) of Cobb Hill Construction, Inc. take safety precautions while strapping an old garage/barn roof in preparation for a new metal roof in Hopkinton, NH.

Many OSHA standards apply to residential construction for the prevention of possible fatalities.

Another organization in health and safety regulation is the National

Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a research agency focused on preventing work-related illnesses and injuries. The organization is part of the Center for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and moderates a WorkLife Initiative that focuses on worker wellness.

Lastly, the National Safety Council is a nonprofit, non-governmental public service organization focused on protecting life and promoting health. Their website has a vast library of fact sheets, stats, tips, and suggestions for safety both in and out of the workplace. The library features over 80 topics to answer nearly any question a construction professional, home owner or business executive may have.

Some builders find ways to promote participation in safety programs, such as establishing an incentive system to keep employees involved and motivated. Incentives may include a system of earning points exchangeable for gifts, redeemable "safety cards" signed by management for safety compliance, safety games and promotions, tracking

the use of proper safety precautions by department, and providing company-wide incentives for days without safety violations. These methods and others may be used to keep safety in the forefront of employees' minds. The cost of such incentives is insignificant compared to the potentially crippling costs of an unsafe workplace.

Maintaining a safe job site is the No. 1 concern for Jeff Masterson, owner of the 27-year-old J. Masterson Construction in Danvers, MA.

"We are huge on safety," Masterson said. "The biggest challenge we face on the worksite is trench safety, so we put in a program to help solve the problem."

Masterson said out in the field it was becoming a huge challenge to keep even the educated people in trench safety out of the trenches.

"Someone would leave a tool there or something and go back down and get

it. It was a huge problem," Masterson said. "So we made up a rule where if you got caught in a trench that required shoring, we would take money out of their next paycheck and give it to the charity of their choice. We started this 10 years ago. The first month there were two or three guys who had to pay the fine. I thought they would quit, but they sucked it up and stayed. So, we are a little on the strict side, but I think it has helped make our workplace safe. Safety plays a big role in whether or not you get work. We have a good safety record and at the end of the day, with the way these jobs are fast paced, without a good safety record, down the road, it can wipe a company out." ■

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