

Site-Specific Safety Plans

by Jeff Stachowiak

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan.” Wishing that everyone on your job remains safe is not the way to keep them safe. Planning the work on any construction project must include planning for protecting the workers from hazards while they are working.

The purpose of a safety plan is to:

- Identify the hazards that workers will be exposed to;
- Eliminate and/or correct the hazards and/or protect the workers from the hazards;
- Communicate this to all; and
- Follow the plan.



Many construction projects show poor safety planning and execution, the most serious of which is the lack of guardrails. There can be many other safety problems on job sites, such as no personal protective equipment (hardhats, safety glasses, and safety boots)

Identify

Identifying the hazards on your job site is not as daunting as it sounds. The process begins with the estimator or whoever looked at the job when you initially bid the work. If you don't include this step prior to bidding the work, you'll find surprises when your crew shows up that you did not plan for, nor want to pay for. The estimator needs to ask many questions about the hazards that will be present, and who will be responsible for correcting or protecting workers from those hazards. For example, fall protection should be talked about, where appropriate, prior to bidding work. If the owner or general contractor is not planning on putting up something as simple as guardrails, then you may have to so that your workers are protected. This type of extra precaution can greatly add to your bid or costs.

Other hazards often not planned for include:

- Falls;
- Access to work area;
- Overhead obstructions;
- Falling debris;
- Underground hazards, including trenching;
- Electrical;
- Hand tools;
- Hot work;
- Confined space;
- Traffic; and
- Emergency response.

All of these should be discussed and planned for prior to bidding any work to ensure a safe working environment for your crews.

Eliminate, Correct, or Protect

Before deciding on your company's safety plan, find out who on the project is responsible for correcting or protecting workers from those hazards listed previously. Once you have established that, begin eliminating the hazards that you can. Ask questions such as:

- Can the hazards be eliminated?
- Can the hazard be corrected or minimized?
- Can we protect the workers from the hazards?

Another issue that needs to be discussed is what kind of protection is best. Basically, you have two choices: passive protection or active protection. Passive protection is always best because it will

automatically protect the worker. Guardrails are the best example of passive protection from fall hazards. Once they are in place, there is nothing that needs to be done by the worker except stay behind them. Personal fall protection such as harnesses, lanyards, and anchorage are considered active protection. The worker has to wear the harness and lanyards, and hook up prior to entering the fall hazard area. This type of protection depends on many decisions by the worker, which in practice may not work very well.

Communication

Checklists work best to keep track of all the hazards you might encounter on a job. This ensures that the person completing the checklist considers all the hazards that might be present. Leave space on the checklist for the written corrective actions that need to be completed prior to the workers signing the acknowledgment. Communicating your safety plan to all workers in a group meeting should be done prior to the start of work. This meeting probably should be conducted often if job-site conditions or hazards change. Once the workers sign the acknowledgment on the checklist, they know about the hazards and what was done to correct them and/or what they need to use or wear to protect themselves from the hazards.

Follow the Plan

Following the plan is always the toughest part of the safety plan. One reason it is difficult is because of simple human nature. It is human nature to take shortcuts and justify them in one's own mind. This is where you hear someone say something like, "The job is only going to take 5 minutes. I don't need to: a) hook up; b) wear safety glasses; or c) put guardrails up." Safety should be part of your company culture at all times. Supervisors need to make sure everyone sticks to the plan on every portion of every project, large or small, and, if the plan needs to be changed or amended as the project progresses, then the work needs to stop. Once the

plan is appropriately modified, only then should the project proceed. Regular audits by upper management are always a good practice as well. This enforces the proper use of safety plans.

Keep it Simple

Finally, if you have never constructed a safety plan, don't make it so complicated that no one will use it. Start out with an easy, basic checklist for the most obvious hazards you face on the job site. Just remember these key elements:

- Identify the hazards that workers will be exposed to;
- Eliminate and/or correct the hazards and/or protect the workers from the hazards;
- Communicate this to all; and
- Follow the Plan.

There are no shortcuts to a safe job site. Construction accidents do happen, but with the proper planning, many hazards and accidents can be minimized or eliminated altogether.



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