

## **TOOLBOX TALK #2**

### **IMPROVING CONSTRUCTION SAFETY**

The nature of construction makes it difficult to create safe, stable work zones. Construction workers are exposed to a wide range of hazards such as electricity, toxic substances, work at heights, moving vehicles, trenches, chemicals and confined spaces. Construction projects move quickly and hazards can be unpredictable. Workers must endure physically demanding work, and often must make their own decisions. They may be distracted, fatigued, untrained or have language barriers. Safety responsibilities can become decentralized with multiple employers on site.

Fatalities are multi-causal resulting from the interaction of hazards with deficiencies in management, equipment, workplace, workers and conditions unique to construction. The hazards and causal factors change over time. Each stakeholder (ie., GC, subcontractors, workers, owners) has a role to play in a strategic effort to reduce hazards and causal factors.

The GC is specifically tasked with monitoring and coordinating the work of subcontractors and has the highest level of control over the site. The GC should exercise this control to:

- Prequalify subcontractors based on past safety record and current safety performance
- Anticipate and control hazards by planning work
- Mandate that all workers be adequately trained
- Monitor the site on a regular basis to correct hazards and check subcontractor compliance with safety requirements
- Hold regular safety meetings to review upcoming work and the safety measures that might be required
- Hold toolbox talks to educate workers regarding safe practices
- Provide a site-wide safety plan that all subcontractors are to follow
- Require that subcontractors provide a safety plan for their specific work



Subcontractors must train their employees and follow the site safety plan as well as their own. A hazard created by a subcontractor employee should be addressed so that it does not pose a risk to the sub's employees or to employees of other contractors on the site. Raising awareness can also help. Companies can conduct a safety stand-down by breaking for a toolbox talk, discussing job hazards and inspecting safety equipment. Workers should work safely according to their training and alert other workers of any open hazards that they find.

Construction will continue to be dangerous. The steps taken by the various contractors have created a downward trend in the fatality rate. However, it is still unacceptable. A good planning strategy will make further headway in the reduction of construction fatalities.