

Occupational Health and Safety in Construction Industry

Every year many construction site workers are killed or injured as a result of their work; others suffer ill health, such as musculoskeletal disorders, dermatitis or asbestosis. The hazards are not, however, restricted to those working on sites. Children and other members of the public are also killed or injured because construction activities have not been adequately controlled.

We can so easily believe that accidents will always happen to other people and will never touch us. But unless we all recognize our own vulnerability – and just how vulnerable others can be – then, as a result of the decisions we make, construction workers and their families will continue to witness the unnecessary injuries, pain and suffering that so tragically afflict the industry. In addition, accidents and ill health have a financial cost. The business case for improving performance is absolutely clear.

Construction industry covers following activities:

- general building and construction work;
- refurbishment work;
- maintenance and repair work;
- engineering construction work; and
- civil engineering work.

The construction activities can be divided into following four phases:

- Planning the construction activities or preparing for work;
- Setting up the construction site;
- Actual construction phase;
- Health and Safety Management in Construction Industry and Law.

In the next few issues of SafetyInfo, it is our intention to cover the health and safety issues in all the preceding four phases of construction industry in greater detail.

Planning the construction activities or preparing for work

The key to achieving healthy and safe working conditions is to ensure that health and safety issues are planned, organized, controlled, monitored and reviewed.

Everyone controlling site work has health and safety responsibilities. Checking that working conditions are healthy and safe before work begins and ensuring that the proposed work is not going to put others at risk requires planning and organization.

This applies equally to a firm running and managing a small job, or to a subcontractor working at a large site controlled by someone else. Planning has to consider changes to the site as it develops – from welfare arrangements at the set up, through to snagging work and the dismantling of site huts and hoardings at the end of the contract. The basic requirements apply to all jobs.

The principal contractor has more formal responsibilities for securing health and safety on site.

Planning the work

Gathering as much health and safety information about the project and the proposed site before work begins is important. Information available at tendering should be used so that allowance is made for the time and resources required to deal with particular problems. Sources of information include:

- Client;
- Design team;
- Contract documents;
- Main contractors on the site;
- Specialist contractors and consultants;
- Trade and contractor organizations;
- Equipment and material suppliers; and
- Indian and or other relevant Standards.

Find out about the history of the site and its surroundings. See if there are any unusual features which might affect the work, or how the work will affect others. Pay particular attention to:

- Asbestos or other contaminants;
- Overhead power lines and underground services;
- Unusual ground conditions;
- Public rights of way across the site;
- Nearby schools, footpaths, roads or railways; and
- Other activities going on at the site.

When estimating costs and preparing the program, consider any particular health and safety

hazards associated with the work. Make sure suitable allowances have been made in the price. The job will run more smoothly, efficiently and profitably if hazards have been predicted, planned for and controlled from the outset. Having to stop or reschedule work to deal with emergencies wastes time and money.

When materials are bought, or equipment is hired, the supplier has a duty to provide certain health and safety information. Make sure this is obtained and read. It may be necessary to:

- Consider using a specialist who is familiar with the necessary precautions;
- Carry out an assessment of the health risks arising from substances or equipment; and
- Act on your findings, eg by eliminating harmful substances where possible, or by using a less hazardous method of work or providing training on the safe use of the material or equipment.

When programs are prepared, consider whether there are any operations that will affect the health or safety of others working at the site. For example:

- Think about access to the workplace – which trades will need to go where and when? Arrange the program to make sure everyone who needs to use a scaffold or other means of access has time to do so. Plan to make sure the access will be safe and suitable for their use;
- Timber treatment or site radiography usually has to be done when no one else is on site. The site may have to be left vacant for a few days. Where a specialist contractor is used, check the requirements with them and program the work well in advance.

Discuss proposed working methods with subcontractors before letting contracts. Find out how they are going to work, what equipment and facilities they are expecting to be provided and the equipment they will bring to the site. Identify any health or safety risks that their operations may create for others working at the site and agree control measures. Obtaining health and safety risk assessments and method statements will help.

Decide what plant will be required and check that it will be suitable.

Plan material deliveries and consider storage needs.

Plan your emergency and rescue procedures. Decide what equipment will be required and who is trained to operate it.

Organizing the work

Decide who will supervise the work – check that they are adequately trained and experienced.

When taking on workers, ask about the training they have received and ask to see certificates of training achievement. Get them to demonstrate their knowledge or to show examples of safe working practice before setting them to work.

Make sure that firms coming onto site provide adequate supervision for their workers. Agree what training they will have received or will be provided at the site.

See that work methods and safety precautions agreed before work is started are put into practice. Make sure everyone understands how work is to be done and is aware of relevant method statements before work starts.

Find out if any of the work will be further subcontracted. Make sure that people working for subcontractors also get the information they require and provide training, supervision etc. as needed.

Notifying the site to Relevant Authorities

Relevant Authorities should be notified in writing before construction starts if the work is expected to either:

- last longer than 30 days; or
- involve more than 500 person days of construction work. The notification should be sent to the relevant authority's office nearest to the proposed site.

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE

Readers may please note that D.L. Shah Trust brings out two e-journals on a fortnightly basis. These are mailed to those persons or institutions who are desirous of receiving them: These two e-journals are:

1. Safety Info
2. Quality Info

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