

The

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BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS

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**COMING
ATTRACTIONS**

Aug. 1

*Builders Foundation
Golf Outing*

Makray Memorial Country
Club, Barrington

Aug. 9

*Contractor Safety Forum
Chicagoland Construction
Safety Council, Hillside*

builders association
BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS

Safe In

Every Language

Safety-Conscious Companies Have Ways Of Breaking Language Barrier

BY KATIE SELLS

The growing number of Hispanic trade workers has caused contractors to focus on ensuring the safety of those workers. Communicating with Hispanic workers can be an extremely challenging issue, particularly regarding safety.

Currently, Hispanic trade workers have the highest number of jobsite fatalities, making

it imperative that contractors find ways to effectively communicate and train them to ensure their safety.

While the language barrier is a leading concern there are several cultural differences that affect the way Hispanic tradespeople work.

"Understanding their cultural beliefs is going to get you far," Brian Tibbetts, Safety Director of Illinois Masonry said.

The Hispanic culture is strongly influenced by a devotion to family, which affects the way that they work, according to Pepper Construction Company Safety Director Paul Flentge.

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Hispanic workers help put up Loyola Heart Hospital in Maywood for Pepper Construction Company. The number of Spanish-speaking construction workers has taken a dramatic upturn, posing new challenges to safety professionals.

“Pepper emphasizes the importance of returning home to our families each and every day,” Flentge said. “This is a commitment Pepper believes bridges all cultures.”

To better communicate with these workers, contractors have also found it useful to hire a Spanish speaking liaison on the job site to help translate and teach contractors how to approach and treat Hispanic workers as well as help give directions and orders.

“It is important to become their friend and develop a sense of trust because if they don’t trust you they won’t talk to you which potentially endangers their safety,” Tibbetts said, “It’s more than just a language barrier.”

“We hired someone who was fluent in Spanish and trained him on a number of issues like fall protection, fork lift, scaffolding, first aid, CPR and an OSHA 10-hour information session.”

Flentge says Pepper has developed a set of ‘safety flash cards’ to provide English and Spanish translations of commonly used safety phrases.

“This provides a means of communication if bilingual skills are not an option,” he said.

According to Ceco Concrete Construction Safety Director Tom Bitto, contractors are finding it important to ensure that crews are able to effectively communicate with one another without any language barrier.

“For safety and quality reasons, we would not have a non-English speaking worker in a role where they would communicate with a non-Spanish speaking person,” Bitto said.

“With a bilingual supervisor, the Spanish written procedures and policies, proper job assignments and working around the English speaking crews we believe that we can train Hispanic workers in a relatively short time.”

With education and training through the resources of organizations like the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and the Hispanic American Construction Industry



The steady rise in Spanish speaking construction workers has prompted the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to hire five Spanish speaking compliance officers. Above, Pepper workers on the job at Loyola Heart Hospital.

Association (HACIA), contractors can feel confident in the safety of their workers while on a jobsite.

LATINO WORKPLACE INJURIES AND FATALITIES

In September of 2006, a panel gathered to discuss Latino Workplace Injuries and Fatalities within the state of Illinois. This panel included: Congressman Luis Gutierrez; LECET Executive Director Patrick Hosty; and President of The Illinois AFL-CIO, Margaret Blackshere.

Numbers indicate that Latino workers are more likely than other workers to be killed or injured on the job. Nationally, fatalities for workers on the job have fallen 16 percent since 1994, but alarmingly Latino fatalities escalated 27 percent between 1994 and 2003.

The opinion of the panel was that the rise in fatalities is related to the fact that Hispanic workers often work in more hazardous occupations, face cultural and language barriers on the jobsite and fear retaliation if they report unsafe conditions.

Illinois is among the top 10 states in Latino population, which makes it imperative that contractors make it a priority to increase the safety measures for Hispanic workers.

An OSHA study has found that injuries and deaths on jobsites stem from language and cultural barriers. One-fourth of all fatalities investigated by OSHA were directly related to those causes.

THE ROLE OF OSHA

OSHA is going to great lengths to help improve the safety of Hispanic workers on jobsites and has implemented several tools and resources to help not only assist Hispanic workers but the contractors who work with them.

“It depends on what generation they are,” said OSHA District 5 Executive Director Diane Turek. “If they are second or third generation they are more assimilated to American culture. However, if they are first generation they may hesitate to come forward in fear of losing their job.”

To fill this cultural gap, OSHA Region 5 has recently hired five Spanish speaking Compliance Officers who assist the Hispanic workforce through a hotline. This hotline is designed to allow Hispanic workers to report safety issues, discrimination or other issues that the

With education and training through the resources of organizations like OSHA and HACIA, contractors can feel confident in the safety of their workers on a jobsite.

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compliance officers can help address.

"When they are able to speak to someone in Spanish, it puts them at ease and they feel that they can confide in them," Turek said.

In addition to the hotline they have created E-Tools, interactive web based training which illustrates and contains graphical menus. They also have developed quick cards which contain basic safety guidelines and an e-dictionary which translates English to Spanish and vice versa.

A 10-hour OSHA safety training course for Spanish workers was created through a joint effort with HACIA. However, the main issue of improving safety with Hispanic workers is opening the lines of communication and developing a sense of trust.

"Through education and outreach, OSHA lets Hispanic workers know that they have someone to call," Turek said.

Hispanic workers currently have the highest number of fatalities, especially falls, which is a main issue that OSHA is addressing. Due to increase in awareness and education, the number of Hispanic worker fatalities from 2005-2006 has decreased by 2.3 percent according to Turek. However, the number of fall fatalities was up in 2006.

THE ROLE OF HACIA

HACIA recognizes that the issue of Hispanic trade workers' safety is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue, and is quick to point out that the issue is much larger than a communication barrier.

"It is a language barrier but it's also an education barrier," said Cesar Santoy, Executive Director of HACIA. "Many Hispanic workers can not read Spanish, let alone English."

In an effort to educate and increase the safety of Hispanic trade workers, HACIA has formed a strategic alliance with OSHA. Bilingual professionals were hired for the OSHA 10-hour safety course.

Not only does HACIA provide training to its members but also to companies as a whole.

The organization holds seminars with contractors that address the economic benefits of jobsite safety including the State of Illinois Work Safety Seminar in Spanish.

Through seminars and training programs, HACIA hopes to encourage contractors to increase the safety measures for Hispanic workers.

"We hope to instill a conscience on behalf of the employer to encourage them to foster an atmosphere of safety," Santoy said. "Encouraging employers to increase safety will encourage employees to work."

Another main issue that HACIA faces is trying to reach what their organization refers to as small contractors who work in residential and commercial construction. They are often lucrative, but are not plugged into any large associations, according to Santoy.

"Many of these 'under the radar' contractors are not aware of the resources out there and that there is a supportive network of associations that can help them."

Contact Andy Cole with comments
or story ideas for The Builder.
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