SAFETY ACCOUNTABILITY IT IS EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY!

Over the years, safety accountability has been a hot topic for contractors in the Carolinas. Being accountable is not a simple thing to do; however, it is necessary and is very effective in maintaining jobsite safety.

First, what exactly is "Safety Accountability"? The dictionary defines "accountable" as "being answerable for your actions." This means that not only is everyone responsible for his or her own actions, but also accountable or responsible for those actions. If we chose not to have a safety program or chose not to work safely, we are to be held accountable to someone for these compromising actions.

Who is actually responsible and should be made accountable for jobsite safety? Some people say it is the employer’s responsibility to provide a safe work place, while others believe it is the duty of the employee to follow company policies and work safely. The truth is, both answers are correct. It is everyone’s responsibility to address construction jobsite safety. Not only is it the smart thing, but also it is the OSHA Standard. Safety is a "team effort" and affects everyone from the owners of the company to the newest hired laborer. For this reason, it is in everyone’s best interest to actively participate in the safety program.

Owners and Upper Management’s Responsibility: The owners and upper management of a construction company should authorize the resources of time and money to provide safety training and equipment for employees. Don’t look at safety as an added expense to your company, but as a bonus to your company’s product. It has been proven that as “Safety Accountability” becomes as important as production and quality, production and quality will improve. In addition, your employees will know you care and the majority of employees will respond positively towards safety.

Owners and managers must gain employees’ trust by showing them that you "walk the talk." This is an extremely important point, as you will lose all control and respect of your employees if you do not back your program up with actions. Although it is not suggested that you to spend all your company’s profits on safety, an investment of some money into the safety program will save your company money in the long run. This money is for employee training, safety equipment, safer tools and equipment, and various other necessities. In addition to money, management also needs to invest time into the safety program. This will let employees know that management "walks the talk." D in other words, demonstrates that safety is a priority.

Employee Responsibility: Although it is the employer’s responsibility to set the stage and provide the resources for company safety, the employee also has a big responsibility to follow company safety policies and procedures. Employees must understand that the ultimate reason for the safety rules is to prevent injury. Once management provides the training and other needed resources for employees to adhere to the rules, there must be an accountability system in place to monitor safety performance.

So what type of things should an employee be responsible for? Below are a few basic areas for which employees should be made accountable

- Follow all company safety policies and procedures
- Focus on the job
- Continuously monitor work area
- Notify supervisor about hazardous work conditions or unsafe workers
- Maintain a clean work environment
- Be part of the team and solution, NOT part of the problem
The next step is to develop and implement a safety accountability program.

First, it is important to address safety in the most positive light, not as a burden. Do this by drawing up a company mission statement regarding safety and get owners and upper management to endorse it. Next, there should be a formal safety program that lays out the company safety rules. Employees must have guidelines to follow; the written safety program should include specific safety rules such as dress code, use of required PPE, Drug-Free Work Place Policy, Disciplinary Procedures and Reporting Procedures for hazards and accidents. The safety program should also include OSHA standards as per specific job hazards (i.e., fall protection, scaffolding, electrical, trenching/excavation, ladders and stairs, etc.). Thus, employees will be able to refer to the company’s safety manual as necessary.

Once the formal written safety program is completed, then comes the training and implementation phase. All employees (even those who have been with the company for many years) should be adequately trained on company’s safety program. "Safety Accountability" can-not be expected without the appropriate guidelines and training.

Now that the safety program has been developed and implemented, how does "Safety Accountability" become reality? Here is where successful contractors distinguish themselves above and beyond other contractors. Management must first be willing to enforce its safety program. If the positive approach towards safety does not work, management must be willing to use disciplinary procedures (i.e., a three-strikes-and-you're-out program where employees can earn back their strikes for "safe" behavior etc., following a safety lapse). However, the disciplinary procedures must be handled with consistency. This may even mean firing someone who has been with the company for a long time or is a friend; therefore, this recommendation is not made lightly. Contractors must realize that people’s lives and a business’ financial health are at stake.

Two other effective programs may work for you in dealing with "Safety Accountability." One is to have an employee safety incentive program. Remember that an effective safety program must be established prior to the implementation of an incentive program. Contractors may try to replace a safety program with an incentive program. Taking shortcuts like this will frequently result in poor quality and lost time. Moreover, an increase in accidents or incidents will likely occur creating personal injury and financial loss.

The other effective method is to have a claims charge-back system in place. This system affects the jobsite supervisor and the project manager. As claims occur on a job, a percentage of or all of the cost related to the accident is charged back to that job. This procedure is a powerful incentive for field management, who are "Accountable" for safety on their jobs.

As you can see, "Safety Accountability" is simple in concept, but can be a challenge to implement and enforce. However, many Carolinas contractors have been very successful in the development, implementation and enforcement of such a program. The key is to remain committed to safety and established procedures, programs and standards. At minimum, safety is every bit as important as production and quality.