

Safety First

Safety is an integral part of the construction process. It's probably the single most important issue every diligent contractor faces. However, working in the occupied environment creates additional safety concerns from both the owner's and the contractor's perspective.

For example, an owner who needs to remodel and/or add on to an existing facility cannot afford to relocate the entire office to a temporary facility, and then back again when the construction work is completed. Financially, this is not feasible. The solution is for the owner or the facility manager to seek out a contractor who is a specialist in working in the occupied environment. The owner bears the responsibility of making sure that their employees and visitors to the facility are safe during the construction process.

From the contractor perspective, safety is an on-going everyday issue. There are many OSHA regulations that a contractor must follow that provide guidelines for safety. The contractor is also faced with workmen's compensation insurance based upon industry standards. As a consequence, the contractor has a continual program for educating their workers regarding safety issues. There is a strong commitment to safety from top management all the way down to the job site.

It's the job site where the owner and the contractor meet. In the case of the occupied environment, there are important steps that can be initiated that directly relates to safety. Temporary staging areas can be set up, work can occur before and after office hours and the movement of traffic patterns for people and materials can be managed. The owner relies on the contractor for their expertise of construction safety issues.

There are two important factors an owner/facility manager can evaluate to determine the safety qualifications of a contractor. They are as follows:

- Insurance Modification Rate
- Contractor's Safety Programs

The Insurance “Modification Rate” is an industry standard. It is an experience-rating factor that judges all contractors in specific categories. A rate higher than 1.00 means that the contractors premiums will be higher than that of an average company in the same category. For example, a rating of 1.10 means the contractor will pay a 10% surcharge on insurance. A rating of .90 means the contractor will have earned a 10% credit on their base workers compensation premiums.

An owner/facility manager reviewing several contractors can ask for their modification rate as part of their proposal, and quickly determine by an industry standard the safety history of the Contractor.

The “Contractor’s Safety Program” is also an important yardstick for judging a contractors commitment to safety. There are several key questions that can be asked that provides a background regarding safety.

- What are the actual safety programs a contractor has established?
- Is there a full time safety manager?
- Are there toolbox seminars, or on-site safety presentations on a regular basis?
- What kinds of testing do the employees receive on an annual basis relative to safety?
- What kinds of training programs are the employees sent to?
- Does the contractor have safety manuals?

Safety starts with planning during pre-construction activities, and it never stops until the end of the project. Such considerations as how the site is laid out, and where the materials are stored are important. Often, safety gets overlooked when there are many different activities going on at the same time. This is particularly important when there is a lot of on-site labor with different trades working together. A clean site is critical to safety as well as the maintenance of tools and construction equipment.

Drug and alcohol testing is also part of the safety program as it becomes a red flag for accidents waiting to happen. Special considerations for confined space entry, heavy equipment safety, and hazardous materials are also important issues that need to be considered. Safety is important. It’s everyone’s concern and responsibility.

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