

Empowering and Involving Employees

Construction management, in partnership with their employees, is responsible for ensuring that jobsite hazards are eliminated, or at least minimized. These partnerships are most effective when they exist within a positive safety climate.

The **safety climate** on a construction jobsite refers to managements' and employees' shared perceptions about the extent to which safety is rewarded, expected, valued and reinforced. It may be influenced by things such as project scheduling and planning methods and norms of the trades working on-site.

Involving employees in safety-related planning and decision making, and encouraging them to discuss potential hazards will improve employee-management communication, build trust, and promote a positive safety climate that is important to getting the job done. Which of the following best describes your company?

INATTENTIVE	→ REACTIVE	→ COMPLIANT	→ PROACTIVE	→ EXEMPLARY
Management isn't interested in and won't involve employees in safety discussions or encourage them to share responsibility for their and their co-workers' safety.	Employees aren't engaged in discussions on how to promote safety and prevent injuries. Management passes down safety messages to employees only when there is an incident or injury. Safety committees meet only after someone is injured and employees may not be represented on the committee.	Management shares information with employees only when it's required by law. Standing safety committees may exist but meetings last only a few minutes, and although employees may voice concerns, management may or may not address them.	Management actively involves employees in identifying hazards and solving safety problems by including them in daily pre-job safety meetings and job hazard analyses. A management-employee safety committee provides suggestions and makes recommendations. Employees participate in all aspects of ensuring a safe employees	Safety meetings and walk-arounds focus on solving specific problems identified by employees and others. Problems are promptly addressed and communicated to employees. Employees can observe changes and are empowered to provide additional feedback.

How to become exemplary

Review the ideas below and check the short-term (1-2 months), mid-term (6-12 months), or long-term (1-2 years) circle to indicate which you will commit to adopt and by when. Congratulations, if you've already adopted the idea!

Idea #1 - Hold site orientations that encourage employees to become involved in safety

An exemplary site orientation helps empower employees at the beginning of a project by informing them of potential hazards and creating a safety climate where employees are expected to identify and address hazardous conditions. Employees should be informed of their right – and obligation – to stop work if they see a hazardous situation AND are assured that there will be no reprisal for doing so. Site orientations are also used to inform employees of jobsite safety and health plans, key health and safety procedures and people on site, and how to contact those people. By the end of the orientation, employees should understand their safety and health rights, including their right to consult in safety-related decision making. Companies might consider ongoing coaching and mentoring to reinforce the knowledge gained and positive behaviors attained.

- Already Adopted
- Short-term
- Mid-term
- Long-term

Idea #2 - Conduct daily briefings where everyone on-site participates in pre-task planning and job hazard analysis

Daily morning (and sometimes also afternoon) huddles (also called tool box talks, tailgate meetings, or pre-shift safety meetings) provide an excellent opportunity to involve and empower employees on an ongoing basis. Everyone should participate in discussions about the work they are doing, the potential hazards associated with the work, and how hazards can be diminished to avoid injuries and exposures. Employees should be encouraged to ask questions and share their ideas.

- Already Adopted
- Short-term
- Mid-term
- Long-term

Idea #3 - Conduct joint walk-arounds throughout the work day

Sometimes things discussed at the daily huddle change as the day progresses. Having a joint management-employee team walk around the site and look for potential problems helps keep everyone in the loop. This activity ensures two-way conversations between management and employees, encourages employee involvement in identifying safety issues and suggestions, and demonstrates that safety is valued.

- Already Adopted
- Short-term
- Mid-term
- Long-term

Idea #4 - Provide and encourage employees to use anonymous suggestion boxes and/or a call-in number

Some employees might not be comfortable making safety suggestions directly to their supervisor or foreman but they should still be given the opportunity to do so. Providing anonymous suggestion boxes or a call-in number empowers employees to make suggestions to address concerns when trust may be a problem. Place boxes in multiple locations where secrecy can be maintained, and also periodically remind and encourage employees to use them. As suggestions are received, management should communicate how problems were fixed and recognize and reward good suggestions.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea #5 - Obtain employee feedback using periodic surveys and informally talking during the workday

Employees feel empowered when they are asked directly for their opinions about ways to improve the jobsite safety climate. This can occur through anonymous surveys or in person. Surveys should be administered by a third party and can be effective for finding differences in safety perceptions between workers and supervisors. Interviewing employees can be very informative, but is obviously not anonymous. Employees should be approached and interviewed in a non-threatening manner by a trusted source. Interviewing employees as they leave the jobsite can be a good way to learn about issues that may be contributing to a negative safety climate.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea #6 - Create joint employee-management engagement committees to address specific safety and health concerns

Joint labor-management safety and health committees focus on identifying and addressing jobsite safety concerns. Their collaborative nature regarding power and responsibility for safety-related decision-making helps produce mutual trust between management and employees. Small businesses could consider creating ad hoc safety action groups or “safety circles” where employees and management address issues raised at weekly and daily meetings, using suggestion boxes, a call-in number, or surveys. Prompt follow-through on concerns using these groups demonstrates the company takes employees’ suggestions seriously, which encourages employees to stay involved and engaged in implementing safety. For many companies it may be helpful to integrate safety into regular project planning meetings.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term