Improving Communication

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.

How a company formally and informally communicates about safety through words and actions can have a significant impact on the jobsite safety climate. Effective safety-related communication can create a strong, positive climate, while poor communication can stifle it. Good communication involves both talking and listening. Which of the following best describes your company?

INATTENTIVE →	REACTIVE →	COMPLIANT →	PROACTIVE →	EXEMPLARY
No system exists for employees to speak directly to management, and communication is one-way (no dialogue). Supervisors and foremen do not share concerns raised by the workers in their crews with management.	Management normally responds to employees' complaints when raised, although it may not be prompt. Employees are sporadically provided with informal feedback on hazard reports and incident/injury information. Issues are not tracked, and information is not shared on how employees' concerns were or will be addressed.	Supervisors and foremen pass safety-related information to the workers in their crews as required by management and OSHA.	Workers are encouraged to report safety concerns and issues either to their supervisor, foreman, or directly to management. Workers actively participate in incident reviews. Supervisors and foremen initiate hazard identification and safety discussions with workers.	Workers, supervisors, and management are actively engaged in on-going communication about safety. Workers get timely feedback after action is taken. There are formal systems for gathering feedback and sharing incident information.

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 - Review company safety materials to ensure a consistent positive safety climate message

There are many communication channels within an organization, both formal and informal. Mixed messages about safety and productivity can severely damage the mutual trust between employees and management that is necessary for a positive safety climate. Management should evaluate all materials and communication processes to ensure safety is consistently highlighted and equal to other company goals and objectives. Supervisors and foremen should be aware that their actions and behaviors can negatively affect communication or negate the message that safety is valued.

⬤ — Already Adopted
⬤ — Short-term
⬤ — Mid-term
⬤ — Long-term

Idea #2 - Communicate contents of policies and procedures to all employees

Not all company policies and procedures focus on safety. However, even those that do not should be reviewed to see if there may be a safety component to include. Ensure policies and procedures are written clearly and are available and understood by all employees, including all non-English speaking employees. Take time to review policies and procedures with all employees at hire, at least annually, and also when any organizational changes occur.

⬤ — Already Adopted
⬤ — Short-term
⬤ — Mid-term
⬤ — Long-term

Idea #3 - Be transparent about how employees' safety concerns will be addressed

As issues arise, be visible and engage employees in reviewing related policies and procedures. Consider developing an online incident reporting system employees can use to notify management when a close call or hazardous condition occurs. Also consider creating an "action list" and post it in a visible place to show how issues raised by employees are being addressed.

⬤ — Already Adopted
⬤ — Short-term
⬤ — Mid-term
⬤ — Long-term

Idea #4 - Create opportunities to communicate directly with employees about safety

Companies should use both formal and informal methods to facilitate consistent and open communication about safety among project owners, management, and employees. Open dialogue helps employees trust that management values safety, which empowers them to participate in protecting themselves and their co-workers. Project owners should be visible, accessible, and engage in two-way dialogue with employees. It is critical that management be sensitive to non-English speaking employees to ensure they can meaningfully participate in safety discussions. Some mechanisms for creating an open dialogue both on and off the jobsite include:

4a. Joint employee-management engagement committees or safety action groups

These committees distribute power and responsibility for safety-related decision making, which encourages mutual trust between employees and management. Barriers to employee participation should be eliminated.

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

4b. Daily safety discussions

Daily safety discussions (or huddles) provide an excellent opportunity to involve and empower employees in identifying and addressing hazards in a timely manner. They take approximately 15 minutes and are part of pre-task daily planning where possible hazards and how to prevent them are discussed.

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

4c. Joint walk-arounds and informal conversations with employees

A joint management-employee team site walk-around helps identify and address new concerns as they emerge during the day. Informal conversations with employees throughout the day are an effective way to reaffirm that safety is valued and promote ongoing two-way conversations between employees and management about potential safety concerns.

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