



Many Construction Safety and Health Materials Poorly Designed for a Worker Audience

Evaluating the readability and suitability of construction occupational safety and health materials designed for workers

Clayton Sinyai, Brenda MacArthur, and Thomas Roccotagliata. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, August 2018.

Overview

Printed materials for training and hazard communication are an essential part of occupational safety and health programs, but must be accessible to their intended audience. Researchers collected 103 safety training handouts, brochures, and Safety Data Sheets designed for distribution to construction workers and scored them for readability and suitability using four standard health communication instruments.

Key Findings

- Approximately one-third of the training materials exceeded an eighth-grade level of reading difficulty, a ceiling recommended by many communication experts.
- Most of the written materials could have been improved by adopting health communication best practices such as focusing on a single main message and “call to action,” summarizing the main message at the start of the document, using clear and informative subheadings and bold print to reinforce key points, and including step-by-step instructions for recommended behaviors.
- Because Safety Data Sheets are legally required to address multiple audiences with multiple messages, construction employers whose workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals on the job should supplement the SDS with materials targeted to their workforce.
- Writers preparing materials for worker training can make their materials more accessible by using widely available readability calculators and suitability checklists (such as the Suitability Assessment of Materials and the CDC Clear Communication Index).

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See abstract:

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