

## Peer-led Health and Safety Training and the Construction Unions

### **Doing it old school: Peer-led occupational safety training in the U.S. construction industry**

*Clayton Sinyai, Pete Stafford and Chris Trahan. McGill Journal of Education, Fall 2013.*

#### **Overview**

Many labor organizations that sponsor occupational health and safety training champion “peer training,” preferring instructors drawn from the shop floor over academically credentialed experts. But peer training is hardly new: in the skilled trades, master craftsmen have instructed apprentices since the Middle Ages. Building on the apprenticeship model, the U.S.-based construction unions have created a network of more than 4,000 peer trainers. These certified trainers bring enjoy a special credibility with workers not available to the expert with specialized educational credentials but no experience working at the trade. Training as many as 100,000 men and women in the each year, the trades have established an expectation throughout the commercial construction industry that workers, not just supervisors, receive standard “OSHA-10” hazard recognition training.

#### **Key Findings**

- Many labor organizations sponsor outreach training in occupational health and safety, but the scale of peer training in the building trades is unique. In most industries, job training falls to employers or public educational institutions. In construction, the 15 unions themselves direct a vast network of apprenticeship and training funds, with an annual budget estimated at nearly \$1 billion.
- The building trades unions, with the cooperation of contractors employing union labor, grafted a voluntary OSHA safety training program onto their apprenticeship system in the 1990s. OSHA outreach training for construction, known as “OSHA-10” (10-hour) or “OSHA-30” (30-hour), has been mandated for apprentices in most or all of the building trades.
- Local and state building trades councils have worked with occupational safety activists and public health advocates to promote state laws requiring OSHA-10 training for workers in some or all categories of construction. Seven states have adopted such laws, and private construction owners increasingly demand proof of OSHA outreach training for their contractors’ workers.
- Between 2010 and 2012, despite the downturn caused by the recession, the 4,000+ peer trainers in the union building trades delivered OSHA outreach training to more than 70,000 apprentices and journeymen per year. In the commercial construction sector, OSHA outreach training is becoming a standard requirement.

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#### **See full report:**

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