

# Empowering and Involving Workers

Construction companies in partnership with workers are 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 specific construction project refers to managements' and workers' shared perceptions of the adequacy of the safety and health programs and the consistency between the organization's espoused safety policies/procedures and the actual conditions at the jobsite. It is the combination of safety climates from multiple organizations including the project owner, construction manager/general contractor, and subcontractors and it may be influenced by local conditions such as project delivery, scheduling, planning methods and existing norms amongst involved trades.

Involving workers in safety-related planning and decision making and empowering them to speak up when they identify hazards will help bridge the communication gap between workers and management, build mutual trust, and promote a shared belief that a positive safety climate is integral to getting the job done. Which of the following best describes your company?

UNINFORMED	REACTIVE	COMPLIANT	PROACTIVE	EXEMPLARY
Management isn't interested in and therefore doesn't involve workers in safety discussions or empower them to share responsibility for their and their co-workers' safety.	Management passes down safety messages to employees only when there is an incident, injury, or negative event. Workers aren't engaged in promoting safety. Safety committees meet only when someone is hurt. Inspections are not carried out routinely and items found on inspections are not prioritized or tracked to abatement. There is no accountability at any level with respect to safety and health.	Management shares information with workers. Standing safety committees may exist but meetings last only a few minutes, and although workers voice safety concerns, management does not act to address these concerns.	Management actively involves workers in identifying hazards and solving safety problems by including them in daily pre-job safety and crew task/hazard analysis. There is a management-worker safety committee that provides suggestions and makes recommendations. Workers participate in all aspects of ensuring a safe jobsite.	Safety meetings and walk-arounds focus on solving specific problems identified by workers and others. Problems are promptly addressed and communicated to workers. Workers can observe changes and are empowered to provide additional feedback. Safety as a value is demonstrated across all facets of the organization.

## 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 empower workers to become involved in their own and their co-workers' safety

An exemplary site orientation helps empower workers right from the start of the project by informing them of potential hazards and setting the expectations regarding workers' role in identifying and addressing potentially hazardous conditions. Workers ought to be informed of their right (and obligation) to stop work if they perceive or see a hazardous situation AND are ensured that there will be no reprisal for doing so. Site orientations are also used to inform workers of jobsite safety and health plans, who to go to with questions about health and safety procedures on-site, and how to contact that person. By the end of the orientation, workers should understand their safety and health rights. Companies might consider on-going coaching and mentoring to reinforce the knowledge gained and positive behaviors attained.

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

### Idea 2—Conduct participatory daily briefings in which everyone working on-site is involved in pre-task planning and job hazard analysis

Daily huddles (also called Tool Box Talks, Tailgate Talks, or Pre-Shift Safety Meetings) provide an excellent opportunity to involve and empower workers on an ongoing basis. Everyone should participate in discussions about the work that will be taking place, the types of hazards that might be associated with the work, and how hazards can be mitigated to avoid injuries and exposures. Workers should be encouraged to actively participate in the huddle by asking questions and sharing 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 site meeting change as the day progresses. Having a joint management-worker team walk around the site and look for potential problems helps keep everyone in the loop. The walk-around activity ensures two-way conversations between management and workers, encourages worker involvement in identifying safety issues and suggestions, and demonstrates that safety is valued by the organization.

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

**Idea 4—Provide and encourage workers to use anonymous suggestion boxes and/or a call-in number**

Some workers might not feel comfortable making suggestions directly to their foreman, supervisor, or other higher-level manager regarding worksite safety. Nevertheless, they should still be given the opportunity to do so. Providing anonymous suggestion boxes, a call-in number (answered by a non-company person) or some anonymous digital communications channel (e.g., web bulletin board) empowers workers to make suggestions for addressing concerns on jobsites where trust between management and workers is underdeveloped. To reduce barriers, place boxes in multiple locations where anonymity can be maintained and also periodically remind and encourage workers to use them. As suggestions are received, management needs to follow through by demonstrating and communicating to workers how problems were fixed and make sure that good ideas and suggestions are recognized and rewarded.

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

**Idea 5—Obtain feedback from workers by administering periodic surveys and informally touching base during the workday**

Workers feel empowered and part of a larger effort when they are asked directly for their opinions about the safety climate on the job site and ways it can be improved. This can be done through surveys or in-person. If surveys are used, it's important that they be anonymous and may be better if administered by an outside party. Surveys are most effective for identifying program disconnects when supervisors and workers both participate using similar questions and results are compared to identify differences in perceptions and actions. Interviewing workers can be very informative, but obviously face-to-face requests can't be anonymous. It is critical that the worker be approached and interviewed in a non-threatening manner and by a trusted source. Interviewing workers as they leave employment on the jobsite can be a good source of data for identifying indicators of both safety and non-safety problems that may be contributing to a project's negative safety climate.

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

**Idea 6—Create joint worker-management committees to address specific safety and health concerns**

Joint worker-management safety and health committees are often used in larger companies and include management and workers who focus specifically on identifying and addressing worksite safety concerns. Their collaborative nature regarding power and responsibility for safety-related decision making helps to produce mutual trust between management and workers. Where smaller companies are limited in their capacity to establish a standing committee, they should create ad hoc safety action groups or "safety circles" where workers and management come together to address issues raised at weekly and daily meetings. Prompt follow-through on concerns using these groups demonstrates the company takes workers' suggestions seriously which in turn encourages workers to stay involved and engaged in improving safety. For many companies it may be helpful to integrate safety into regular production meetings so it is not seen as something separate.

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

**Idea 7—Frequently encourage and reward workers for reporting safety concerns and/or injuries. Address problems voiced by workers visibly and promptly, and communicate the impact and results of worker engagement processes.**

This helps build trust that safety is valued, and encourages workers to become proactively involved in helping to identify and address safety concerns. Consider developing an "action list" to show which (and how) issues raised by workers are being addressed. Place the list in a prominent place for all to see to ensure accountability for making progress. There should be on-spot recognitions (e.g., "attaboy", tokens such as Good Catch coins) as well as management recognition. The latter requires implementing a system (e.g., on-line incident report system) that notifies management when a close call is reported and then management can personally call and thank the employee who reported it. All of these activities demonstrate to workers that their contributions to improving project safety climate are valued.

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