Improving Communication

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.

Clear and consistent communication about the importance of safety and its alignment with production and other organizational goals and objectives is at the core of all other factors. How an organization formally and informally communicates about safety issues 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 ineffective or poor communications can stifle it. Which of the following best describes your company?

UNINFORMED →	REACTIVE →	COMPLIANT →	PROACTIVE →	EXEMPLARY
Management discourages (and may even reward) supervisors and workers from reporting injuries and hazards. Supervisors fail to share concerns raised by their crew to management. No system exists for workers to speak directly to management. Employees who take shortcuts in safety are rewarded for meeting production goals.	Management responds to employee complaints when raised, although not always promptly. Employees are sporadically provided with informal feedback on hazard reports and incident/injury information, but not with information on how employee concerns were or will be addressed. Issues are not tracked nor are resolutions communicated across the organization.	Supervisors pass safety information to their crew as required by management. Injury reports are filed as required. There is no overt reprisal for employees who report injuries or hazards.	Employees are encouraged to report safety concerns and issues either to their supervisors or directly to management. Employees participate in incident reviews. Supervisors actively initiate hazard identification in discussions with employees.	Employees are actively engaged in communicating about safety. They are rewarded for raising concerns and reporting close calls, and they get timely feedback after action. Employees and supervisors actively plan all tasks including safety. 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

Management should evaluate all materials and communication processes to ensure safety is consistently highlighted and equal to other organizational goals and objectives. 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 workers and management that is necessary to achieve a positive safety climate. Supervisors should be aware that their actions and behaviors can negatively affect communication or negate the message that safety is a "value".

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

Idea 2—Communicate contents of policies and procedures to all employees

Not all organizational policies and procedures focus on safety. However, even those that don't should be reviewed to see if in fact a safety component exists, but had not been included. Ensure policies and procedures are written clearly and are disseminated and understood by all employees. Take steps to make sure non-English speaking employees understand all materials. Take the time to review policies and procedures with all employees at least annually and also when any changes have been made.

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

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

Engage workers in reviewing policies as issues arise and as part of an organizational continuous improvement process. Consider implementing an on-line incident reporting system that notifies management when a close call or hazardous condition is reported. Also consider creating an "action list" to show how issues raised by workers are being addressed. Place the list in a prominent place for all to see.

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

Idea 4—Create opportunities to communicate directly with workers about safety. Some ideas include:

Organizations should use both formal and informal means of communication to facilitate consistent and open dialogue about safety among owners, management, and workers. Open dialogue helps workers believe that management values safety and empowers them to participate in protecting themselves and their co-workers. It is critical that management is sensitive to non-English speaking workers ensuring they are able to meaningfully participate in safety dialogues. Some mechanisms for creating open dialogue both on and off the jobsite include:

4a. Joint worker-management committees or safety action groups

These committees distribute power and responsibility for safety-related decision making, which encourages mutual trust between workers and management.

— 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 workers in identifying and addressing hazards on a daily basis. They typically take no longer than 15 minutes and are part of pre-task planning. Simply consider the hazards involved with the tasks that will be carried out that day.

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

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

Issues discussed during daily huddles at the beginning of the day may change as the day progresses. A joint management-worker team site walk-around helps identify and address new concerns as they emerge throughout the day. Informal conversations with workers throughout the day are an effective way to reaffirm that safety is valued and promote ongoing conversations between workers and management about potential safety concerns.

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