



Advancing Safety Training through Online Learning

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Companies that establish and maintain a consistent and comprehensive safety training culture can reduce their exposure to litigation, as well as lower or control their experience modification rate, insurance costs, workers' compensation claims and lost man-hours. Amid pressure from the courts and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Multi-Employer Citation Policy, the role of both safety professionals and safety training is more crucial than ever.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the construction industry has seen marked improvement in safety performance during the last two decades. In 1979, the recordable injury rate (RIR) was 16.2 per 100 workers, equating to 16 percent of the workforce suffering injuries that required treatment beyond first aid. By 1992, the RIR dropped 20 percent to 13.1 percent. Since then, the industry's RIR has dropped significantly, posting an all-time low of 4 percent in 2010. This not only represents a remarkable drop of 71 percent, but for the first time since such records have been kept, the construction industry posted a lower injury rate than the manufacturing industry.

Since 1992, the industry's day's away case rate (DACR) has dropped 71 percent—from 530 cases to 150 cases per 10,000 workers in 2010. In terms of fatalities, the construction industry accounted for 14.1 deaths per 100,000 employees in 1992. During the following 13 years, the industry lowered its death rate 21 percent to 11.1 percent.

Knowing this, the question becomes what can industry leaders do to address the fatality rate and continue to prevent minor or disabling injuries? There is no silver bullet; every employer, supervisor and employee must commit to working incident-free and recognize that workplace injuries and fatalities are not tolerated at any level. Additionally, all construction employers should commit to the adoption and implementation of an effective safety or injury and illness prevention program.

An effective safety program encompasses universal interventions that can substantially reduce the number and severity of workplace injuries. Many states have requirements or voluntary guidelines for such programs, and OSHA has a dedicated website (www.osha.gov, search for words "IIPP Programs") for employers interested in developing or improving their programs.

Additionally, new e-learning tools offer effective safety training. Online training—given its widespread availability, flexibility, accessibility and affordability—can be extremely beneficial in communicating with large and diverse teams to meet safety requirements and promote a safe job environment. With access to Internet-based training, many more workers can be trained without taking time from the jobsite. Other issues associated with classroom training can be avoided, including inconsistency of content and presenter delivery, travel requirements, lack of facilities and poor timing.



Online training can range from site orientation and initial skills training to OSHA compliance or specific coursework targeting dangerous activities that can cause injuries or fatalities.

For optimum effectiveness in online training, employers should check that:

- the content is relevant, industry-specific and created by credentialed individuals;
- courses are self-paced and provide structure to increase competency, compliance and retention;
- the application is easy to use with meaningful interactivity;
- the breadth of the course library serves specific industry and general industry needs; and
- Students can easily access courses and customer support.

There is no single answer to ensuring a 100% safe environment, but effective use of tools, including online safety training, can help employers train more workers at a faster rate, and move the industry further toward a zero-accident and zero-fatality environment.

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