



Protección en Construcción

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Difficulty in Reading and Understanding Safety Training

Luis worked as a school teacher for 8 years in his native town in Central America. One year ago, he immigrated to the United States with the hope to start a new life. After almost six months of looking for a job, he finally got a job as a construction laborer. It seemed as the perfect job, he wouldn't speak too much English and nobody would ask about immigration status.

Quickly, Luis learned that time is scarce to complete the job and it is necessary to rush, and the best way to keep the job is avoiding complains and working hard. Despite the fact that he had not experience and neither spoke or read English, Luis signed some forms to certify he completed several trainings. Fortunately on his job, he found someone else that spoke English and Spanish, which helped him to understand instructions and communicate.

In recent days, Luis was working in installing roofs of a small house project. He had seen that the scaffold was unstable and overloaded with materials. He felt afraid to talk about it to his boss because of his difficulties speaking English and his doubts about boss' commitment with workers' health and safety. Though, Luis talked to his partners also they were worried about these hazards but were fearful to complain. They knew that this is not a good time to find good jobs and in the past when workers reported unsafe conditions the contractor threatened them saying: "These are just excuses, if you don't want to do the job there is a line of people waiting for doing it".

Yesterday morning, the scaffold collapsed with three workers on it. One worker died and the other two were severe injured, among them was Luis. The hospital suggested Luis to spend some months at home for recovering. But, Luis knows to survive and to continue sending money at home he needs to find another job as soon as possible.

Although Luis character is fictitious, the facts are based on true stories told by construction workers, supervisors and contractors during focus groups and other activities conducted by PenC. There are hundred of stories about immigrant workers similar to Luis' story all over the world. Employing immigrant workers in the construction industry is a common practice in developed countries, despite the risk and difficulties for speaking the language. Also, a common practice among immigrant workers is trying to compensate their lower language skills with hard work and avoiding troubles. For example, doing all jobs that nobody want to do, not complain about safety conditions, accepting assignments without training or without understanding directions.

Promoting best practices to encourage workers participation in reporting hazards or unfair practices is the manager's and supervisors' responsibility. For instance, providing training in workers' language and literacy level, including ways to demand safe working conditions and refuse dangerous assignments. Working in the construction industry is a risky decision but understanding differences among workers and dealing them respectfully may help to identify problems and reduce hazards.



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FALL PREVENTION REMINDERS:



One outreach member may contact you to invite you to take part in our project.

Community Outreach Team

By Gretchen Lawtosky

One of the activities of Protección en Construcción (PenC): Lawrence Latino Safety Partnership is to engage a broad base of community support for activities of the project by establishing a Community Outreach Team comprised of residents, workers, representatives of city agencies, and representatives of community and neighborhood organizations. The first meeting, which was held in November, was facilitated by Promotores (health promoters) for the project and attended by 20 people from the city. There was a brief presentation of the goals and objectives of PenC, followed by a discussion of issues and concerns for Latino construction workers and a discussion of strategies to engage others in the community. Some of the comments about Latino construction workers were - "Supervisors only concern is to get the job done. They don't care under what conditions.

They push the workers, trying to finish the job." - "Latino construction workers do most of the unsafe work while the American workers don't do it because they know their rights." - "Language is a barrier. If I don't speak English, the supervisor won't allow me to perform the safer and better paying work." The discussion was followed by plans for "charlas", or community meetings, facilitated by Community Outreach Team members and representatives of government agencies such as OSHA, the Massachusetts Division of Occupational Safety, and Lawrence Inspectional Services to share ideas about way to make Latino construction workers safer on the job.



Outreach team members (left to right): Juan Williams, Doris Anziani, Ceferina Williams, Sunilda Peguero and Eduardo Gonzalez.

Safety Walk-throughs

Many injuries in the workplace can be prevented by simple actions to identify and then reduce hazards. For the construction industry, recognizing potential fall and silica hazards is a really important activity in the health and safety program. The first step in assessing hazards in the workplace is to look for them. Site walk-throughs help give an overview of tasks, latent and potential hazards as well as possible impacts for workers' health and safety conditions. Some hazards can be easily seen, such as holes or openings, but others require a more detailed observation. Basic steps to conduct a site walk-through are: selecting a place or activity then walking around to identify hazardous situations, tools or areas; talking with workers about hazards, and reporting your observations. Effective walk-throughs involve workers, supervisors, managers or external auditors because they bring extra set of eyes which may help to observe different hazards that otherwise may be missed.

“Put yourself in someone else’s shoes” - *Cultural Competency*

Working with people from variety of cultures sounds interesting but it is not always simple. For instance, simple manners such as making eye to eye contact may be interpreted by some cultures as an aggressive or defiant attitude while to other cultures avoiding eye contact would demonstrate lack of interest. Even in those with a common language, same words could have different or opposite meanings which bringing misunderstandings to the workplace. Norms, policies, leadership styles, words or orders may be interpreted in different ways by employees according to their previous experiences, values and attitudes. These perceptions affect co-workers and workers-bosses daily job communication and interactions. Everyone has different perspectives about issues, different ways of dressing and expressing personality, and our interpretation of these differences affect every interaction.

Becoming to be more sensitive to other cultures involves knowing and being aware of our differences and similarities related to attitudes, traditions or beliefs. This is key to establish empathy and avoid misunderstanding, for example to language barriers. One of the ways to achieve it, is our willingness to talk openly, honestly and respectfully about differences avoiding prejudices and stereotypes as well as reminding about similarities we all have in common.

Enhancing our capacity to interact with workers taking into consideration their cultural beliefs and needs helps us to build more respectful workplaces and accept diversity as an opportunity to reduce disparities.

REMINDERS

Are you Looking
for
Hazards?
Walk-through is a
safety tool for
direct field
observation



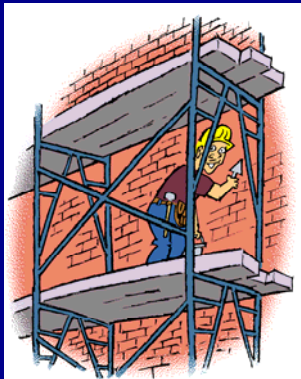
PenC in the National Action Summit for Latino Worker Health & Safety



The PenC Outreach Team (OT) is a group of community outreach workers, residents, non profits groups, and city agencies which are responsible for connecting Latino workers in to the PenC project. Key to outreach to the community is a team of Hispanic residents trained to engaged workers, families, neighborhood, and community networks in support of the research and implementation plan. They will present their experiences with PenC in the National Action Summit for Latino Worker Health & Safety. The summit will take place in Houston, Texas since April 13 to 15.

Personal fall arrest system (PFAS)

Identify the main elements of the personal fall arrest system : (1) anchor point, (2) lifeline,(3) rope grab, (4) shock-absorbing lanyard, and (5) full-body harness



The best responses will receive a beautiful Protección en Construcción T-Shirt.

*Please send your answers to:
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