

Hazards are ever-present in the steel plant environment, and a heightened awareness and emphasis on safety is a necessary priority for our industry. This monthly column, coordinated by members of the AIST Safety & Health Technology Committee, focuses on procedures and practices to promote a safe working environment for everyone.



Author

John Patterson
vice president, Red Pointe Roofing,
Orange, Calif., USA
jpatterson@redpointeroofing.com

Comments are welcome.

If you have questions about this topic or other safety issues, please contact safetyfirst@aist.org.

Please include your full name, company name, mailing address and email in all correspondence.

Analyzing a Successful Safety Program

In the last decade, almost all construction companies have added a section on safety to their website or other promotional vehicles. Talking safety is one thing, but truly making safety the top priority of a company and enjoying its benefits is quite another. A successful safety program does not just happen. It comes as the result of a company-wide commitment and investment in safety and creating a culture of safety. The team members at Red Pointe Roofing have identified the following components of a successful safety program:

Investing in a Full-Time Director of Safety — Probably the greatest factor in separating companies that talk safety and companies that walk safety. Most construction companies have an operations manager who doubles as a safety manager. Having an independent director of safety who answers to a company's top executive ensures corners will not be cut when it comes to safety and that worker well-being will trump production efficiency every time. The cost of a full-time director of safety can be significant; they must possess all the necessary qualifications and credentials required in commercial construction. This cost, while large, more than pays for itself by keeping claims down and reducing workers' compensation premiums.

Pre-Job On-Site Meetings With Operations — Prior to workers ever setting foot on a job, an on-site meeting between safety and operations must take place. During this meeting, the director of safety can identify potential job hazards, inspect wall heights and identify staging areas. This site inspection will give

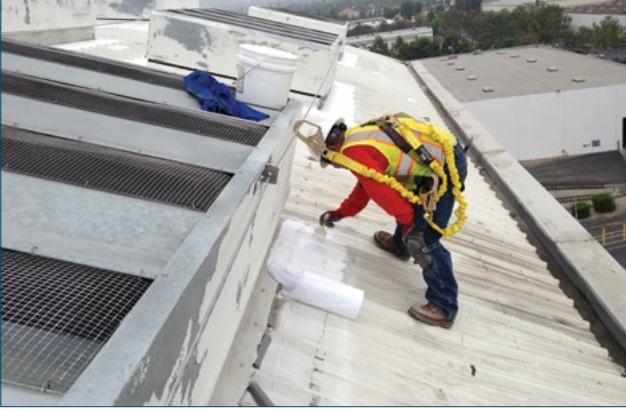
the director of safety a much better perspective to write an effective job-specific safety plan that will allow a job to safely come in on budget.

Written Safety Plans — Every production job should receive a job-specific safety plan. This safety plan is an essential document of every job file. In the safety plan, hazards will be identified and fall protection systems (if required) will be described. The safety plans will be reviewed with crews prior to construction commencement and during toolbox talks once the job is in progress. Only the director of safety may modify a safety plan. The cost of implementing a safety plan will be incorporated into that job's estimating template.

Safety Committee — The formation of a committee consisting of key executives, senior project managers, operations managers and the director of safety is critical to formalize a safety program. Meeting once a month, the committee will review incidents and updated regulations, discuss incentives to promote safe behavior, and set overall safety policy. Minutes of the safety committee meetings will be logged and available to all personnel.

Messaging — Frequent statements reaffirming a company's commitment to safety will subtly convey to all workers that their safety really does matter. Having a company's top executive mention "safety first" at all company events and explaining that the top priority of the company is to ensure workers go home safe to their families is imperative. Having family events such as picnics or holiday parties give the company

Figure 1



Technician utilizing a full body harness and cable anchor system while coating a metal roof.

Figure 2



Technician properly tied off while working at California Steel Industries in Fontana, Calif., USA.

a chance to communicate this message to its workers' spouses and children.

Incentives — Nothing affects human behavior more than the desire for rewards. Incentivizing workers to be safe works and should be part of any successful safety-minded company. The rewards offered for safely working can be anything from gift cards, to paid days off, to verbal recognition and promotion.

Investment in Equipment — A low Ex Mod¹ is the result of many things that will have a financial impact to a company. Like hiring a full-time director of safety, purchasing the most advanced safety equipment is an investment that will more than pay for itself over time.

Procedures, Policies and Administration — On-site safety audits, daily tool box talks, updated Injury and Illness Prevention Programs (IIPPs), accident reports, claims management, fair and equitable discipline, and meticulous record keeping are some of the key components to ensure a safety program will meet its goals and sustain longevity.

Choose a Reputable Insurance Broker — Like everything else, you get what you pay for. Working with stable and reputable insurance companies that have successful track records will ensure you are getting the best insight and advice to manage your risk.

Work With the Right Customers — There are many leading companies that share your commitment to safety. Better yet, these companies know there is a cost to safety and are more than willing to pay for it. It goes back to good business practices and investing. Paying a little more to use a contractor who has invested in the personnel and equipment to minimize risks on construction projects will reduce a company's exposure to major liability caused by an unsafe contractor. Find these companies and take good care of them.

As a result of developing a successful safety program and culture, Red Pointe Roofing currently has an Ex Mod rate of 0.58, which is extremely low for a large commercial roofing contractor. A successful safety program is multi-faceted and requires a company-wide commitment. When successfully implemented, successful safety practices can result in lower Ex Mod rates, and, more importantly, a safe workforce and workplace. ♦

¹California's workers' compensation experience rating system that uses a "modifier" to an employer's workers' compensation insurance rates called an experience modification or "Ex Mod." This merit rating system provides a financial incentive for employers to reduce work-related accidents and the cost of these accidents. California law requires this process, which is administered by the Workers' Compensation Insurance Rating Board, or WCIRB.