NAC Executive Insights

Safety Culture Series

Safe Work Practices

Key Points

- Safe Work Practices document the safe manner and specific tasks individuals are expected to perform. They are an important part of a Safety Management System and are essential to developing a culture of safety.
- Worker input is required in developing and maintaining Safe Work Practices.
- OSHA 10-hour and OSHA 30-hour training programs supplement, but do not eliminate or take the place of the need for Safe Work Practices.
- Safe Work Practices can form the core of curriculum for training programs and toolbox talks.

Introduction

This Executive Insight discusses the importance of well-written Safe Work Practices as part of a Safety Management System to help create and maintain a zero-injury safety culture.

Construction activities involve a multitude of risks and hazards that can potentially endanger workers' health and safety. To address these concerns, it is essential to develop and implement comprehensive Safe Work Practices for specific tasks that workers are expected to perform. Developing safe practices for specific tasks helps identify and assess potential risks and assure that the steps necessary in conducting the task contain the appropriate control measures and mitigation strategies. By identifying potential hazards, establishing preventive measures, training workers, and ensuring adherence of safe work practices, the frequency and severity of incidents, accidents, injuries, and fatalities will be reduced.

Safe Work Practices contribute to increased productivity and reduce costly delays. The practices should be developed and reviewed periodically with worker input. When workers feel included, supported, and safe, they are more likely to focus on their tasks and perform efficiently and effectively.

Safe Work Practices provide a framework for consistent training. By clearly outlining procedures and protocols to be followed in conducting a task, misunderstandings can be avoided, and collaboration is better assured amongst all involved in the task.

What Topics are Covered by Safe Work Practices?

Each organization must develop the specific topics needed for the tasks the organization asks workers to perform. Safe Work Practice needs to cover the specific steps to be taken by an individual in conducting a specific, even if routine, task such as utilizing a specific tool or erecting a temporary structure.

An excellent reference for determining potential topics to be included in Safe Work Practices are the topics covered for OSHA 10 and OSHA 30 certificates. OSHA recommends, but does not require, the 10-hour training course (and the OSHA 10 card) for all construction workers. The 30-hour training course (and the OSHA 30 card) is recommended for any construction employee with supervisory or safety-related responsibilities. (See details of OSHA training courses content in the Appendix.)

While OSHA training requirements provide guidance in determining the types of activities for which an organization's Safe Work Practices are needed, OSHA training does not take the place of companies creating their own specific Safe Work Practices. OSHA training focuses on identifying and avoiding hazards. A company-specific Safe Work Practice focuses on the steps to be taken in conducting and documenting a specific task to eliminate or control the potential hazard.

For example, a welding Safe Work Practice covers in detail the proper procedures to follow in getting permission to weld, checking and moving the equipment, setting up to weld, performing the weld, suspending welding and leaving equipment unattended, shutting down and securing the location, and other associated tasks. Another example of a Safe Work Practice is designing, setting up, maintaining, and taking down barricades, temporary stairways, ladders, and fall protection barriers. Other examples include a Safe Work Practice for utilizing a specific tool or for making lifts.

Each Safe Work Practice should include all documentation required by the organization to show the task was conducted successfully.

Effective Development and Communications of Safe Work Practices

Writing, maintaining, and updating Safe Work Practices promote effective communication among all involved in an activity. To get worker buy-in, it is imperative that workers who perform the task are included in these efforts. This helps to ensure that the Safe Work Practice is practical. A Safe Work Practice which is too complicated and difficult to follow will lead to inefficiencies and eventually be ignored.

An organization's Safe Work Practices establish the core of curriculum for worker training. Not all workers need to be trained on all Safe Work Practices. Anyone who is expected to perform a *specific* task, however, must receive documented training on that specific Safe Work Practice.

Leading organizations encourage workers to give continuous feedback on improving Safe Work Practices. The Safety Management System includes a process for reviewing and updating Safe Work Practices on a periodic basis or whenever current information is received.

A good practice for effective communication is to review Safe Work Practice at a periodic toolbox meeting before the start of work. Such discussion reinforces prior training and encourages feedback on updating Safe Work Practices.

Conclusion

A proper Safety Management System requires that Safe Work Practice documents be developed for the tasks to be performed on the construction site. Standard OSHA 10 and OSHA 30 training can provide guidance as to topics to consider for Safe Work Practices, but they do not provide the specific steps necessary to safely perform and document a task.

Worker input is essential in writing, maintaining, and updating Safe Work Practices. The Safety Management System includes a process for writing, maintaining, and updating Safe Work Practices with worker input.

Safe Work Practices can form the core of training curriculum and toolbox talks.

For Further Reading – Safety Culture Series (Executive Insights)

- Introduction to the Safety Culture Series
- Safety Culture – Human Performance Principles
- Safety Culture – Worker Participation in the Safety Management System (SMS)
- Safety Culture – Demonstrating a Culture of Care and Support: The Leaders' Role
- Safety Culture – Drug and Alcohol Testing
- Safety Culture – Incident/Accident/Near Miss Reporting and Investigations
- Safety Culture – Safety Training

Appendix

The OSHA 10-hour course covers "Introduction to OSHA Requirements":

Fall Protection	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Electrocution Hazards	Health Hazards
Struck-By Hazards	Material Handling
Caught-In Hazards	Tools – Hand and Power

The OSHA 30-Hour "General Industry Training" topics offer more comprehensive insight and education on OSHA-designated health and safety topics. Topics covered are:

Introduction to OSHA	Walking & Working Surfaces
OSHA Inspection Procedures	Welding
Safety & Health Programs	Cutting & Brazing
Recordkeeping	Material Handling
Hazard Communication	Workshop
Exit Routes	Ergonomics
Emergency Action Plans & Fire Protection	Permit-Required Confined Spaces

Fire Detection & Protection	Personal Protective Equipment
Electrical	Industrial Hygiene & Bloodborne Pathogens
Flammable & Combustible Liquids	Hand & Portable Power Tools
Lockout/Tagout	Other Hand-Held Equipment
Machine Guarding	Case Studies & Workshop

Another reference for insight into the topics in an organization's Safe Work Practices is the summary of training requirements in OSHA standards, which is available at https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/osha2254.pdf.

The subjects covered for Construction under 29 CFR 1926 include:

Subpart C – General Safety and Health Provisions
Subpart D - Occupational Health and Environmental Controls
Subpart E – Personal Protective and Life Saving Equipment
Subpart F – Fire Protection and Prevention
Subpart G – Signs, Signals, and Barricades
Subpart I – Tools – Hand and Power
Subpart J – Welding and Cutting
Subpart K – Electrical
Subpart L – Scaffolds
Subpart M – Fall Protection
Subpart O – Motor Vehicles, Mechanized Equipment, and Marine Operations
Subpart R – Steel Erection
Subpart S – Underground Construction, Caissons, Cofferdams and Compressed Air
Subpart U – Blasting and the Use of Explosives
Subpart V – Power Transmission and Distribution
Subpart X – Stairways and Ladders
Subpart Y – Diving
Subpart Z – Toxic and Hazardous Substances
Subpart AA – Confined Spaces in Construction
Subpart CC – Cranes and Derricks in Construction

About the Author

Ken Arnold was elected to the National Academy of Construction in 2014. In his 55 year career in oil and gas for Shell and as founder and CEO of a mid-size project engineering and project management company, he has been recognized by the National Academy of Engineering, Society of Petroleum Engineers, the Offshore Technology Conference, API, and ASME for promoting safety in design, construction, and operations of onshore and offshore production facilities. He also is an author on safety, project management, and facilities design and is a Professional Engineer.

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