**AAMA Analysis**

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## Safety: A Clash of Cultures

**Make Sure Your Jobsite Values the Well-Being of Workers**

**BY RICHARD RINKA**

You have probably seen it at a construction site—particularly on a residential job. Workers are young, tend to be brash, and fancy themselves tough guys immune to accident or injury. Employees sometimes roll their eyes at Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), scoffing at Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. Some giggle at the idea of fall protection. They think it won’t happen to them.

But it happens to someone in this country every day.

As of March 2017, Bureau of Labor Statistics data showed that while the construction industry accounts for only 4 percent of workers, it is responsible for 21 percent of all worker deaths. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2015, fatal injuries for construction laborers hit the highest rate since 2008, and carpenters (including window installers) experienced the highest rate since 2009. According to the Center for Construction Research and Training, there was a 26.1 percent growth rate in overall fatalities from 2011 to 2015.

### The “Fatal Four”

Four categories of injury in the construction sector, a grouping referred to as the “Fatal Four,” are responsible for some two-thirds of construction worker deaths. These categories are falls, being struck by an object, electrocution and “caught-in-between” (CIB).

Recently, more attention has been drawn to the last category, CIB, which occurs when someone is crushed, pinned, caught inside or otherwise trapped between more than one object or parts of an object. These are, unfortunately, common scenarios. In 2016, CIB caused 117 fatalities. The number of CIB fatalities of construction workers, which includes glaziers, increased 33.3 percent from 2011 to 2015.

Despite such statistics, the devil-may-care culture often spills over to the management of residential construction companies. Some try to circumvent the rules by paying crew members as independent contractors and arguing to OSHA (as well as, ultimately, to the IRS) that they aren’t employees. This is common in residential construction—significantly more so than in commercial construction.

True, instituting a safety culture isn’t free. Buying safety equipment for every employee and having them attend training on the clock can be expensive. But the investment pays for itself.

Ignoring safety rules costs money in the form of fines and lawsuits. Workmen’s compensation insurance rates climb following a history of injuries. And, when a worker gets hurt on the job, it takes a toll on the survivors’ morale that slows productivity.

### Toward a Safety Culture

To save time, treasure and tragedy, our industry is coming to better understand the true cost-benefit of an effective safety culture and is moving to implement it with as much enthusiasm as it would a winning competitive marketing strategy.

Approaches to help a company improve its safety culture are cropping up all over and in many different forms.

One example is the new construction safety sciences degree program to be offered this fall by Keene State College in Keene, N.H. It will be the first of its kind in the United States.

Another is the “Safety Fest,” a multi-day training event that offers training classes to raise hazard awareness and instill best work practices. Since their origination in 2005, Safety Fest events are now offered in several states across the western U.S. An increasing number of builders send workers to at least one class at the annual Safety Fest event in their area.

To weigh in on the topic of safety, AAMA instituted its Safety Forum in July 2015. The primary focus is “to share best practices and plant safety program ideas,” concentrating on proper glass handling in fenestration manufacturing plants.

And, in response to the leading construction hazard category of falls, slips and trips, AAMA has contributed to skylight fall protection in the form of a position paper outlining recommended safety measures.

An effective “safety culture” eschews reactionary fixes to problems as incidents occur in favor of an ongoing focus on prevention.

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