

Encouraging Owner/Client Involvement

Construction companies in partnership with workers are responsible for ensuring that jobsite hazards are eliminated or at least minimized. These partnerships are most effective when they exist within a positive safety climate.

The **safety climate** on a specific construction project refers to managements’ and workers’ shared perceptions of the adequacy of the safety and health programs and the consistency between the organization’s espoused safety policies/procedures and the actual conditions at the jobsite. It is the combination of safety climates from multiple organizations including the project owner, construction manager/general contractor, and subcontractors and it may be influenced by local conditions such as project delivery, scheduling, planning methods and existing norms amongst involved trades.

Owners are uniquely positioned to promote safety as an organizational value. They have the authority to develop and issue project policies, shape bidding practices, and ultimately approve budgets – all of which, if done with a focus on safety, can drive a strong project safety climate. Maintaining consistent dialogue with people in the field keeps owners informed of emerging safety concerns, thus providing them with valuable insight into what resources or actions might be needed to eliminate (or reduce) potential hazards. Which of the following best describes your company?

UNINFORMED	→ REACTIVE	→ COMPLIANT	→ PROACTIVE	→ EXEMPLARY
<p>Owner/client does not require safety pre-qualifications from general contractors or sub-contractors and only make selections based on lowest bids. Executive management does not have an understanding of, or presence in, the safety process.</p>	<p>Contractors with poor safety records are excluded from bidding. However, there are no meetings to discuss why the safety record is poor or what they are doing to improve the situation. Data aren’t reviewed for trends.</p>	<p>Owner/client relies exclusively on federal, state, and local safety laws (industry average lagging standards) for pre-qualification criteria but still use low bid for selecting general and sub-contractors. They depend on conventional methods of insuring the job (e.g., insurance provided by the contractors).</p>	<p>Owner/client communicates safety expectations to general contractors and subcontractors, and consistently enforce them on-site. There is a site-specific safety template for each job that all general and subcontractors are required to follow as per their contract. There are regularly scheduled safety meetings with all contractors and owners. Injury and illness trends are reviewed and used to determine weaknesses. Safety programs are reviewed annually at a minimum.</p>	<p>General and subcontractors are selected based on safety practices/climate rather than low bid. Owner participates in employee orientation and may join in daily planning meetings. An owner representative is on-site to monitor and assist with safety program implementation. Owners regularly come on-site to connect with and learn from employees. Prevention through Design (PtD)) and Building Information Modeling (BIM) are used in the design and planning phases which includes workers. Owners provide adequate resources to ensure that safety really is valued equally to productivity.</p>

How to become exemplary

Review the ideas below and check the short-term ● (1-2 months), mid-term ● (6-12 months), or long-term ● (1-2 years) circle to indicate which you will commit to adopt and by when. *Congratulations, if you’ve already adopted the idea!*

Idea 1—Owner presence on-site demonstrates safety buy-in and provides the foundation for a strong safety climate. Some ideas include:



1a. Participate and perhaps lead employee orientation to reflect commitment to safety

Site orientations help familiarize workers with potential hazards at each new jobsite. Orientations also provide an opportunity to establish a foundation for two-way communication between management and workers about safety issues throughout a project. When workers see owners demonstrate that they value safety as a priority, they are more confident that their participation in implementing safety is important.

- — Already Adopted
- — Short-term
- — Mid-term
- — Long-term

1b. Devote adequate resources to implementing safety programs and enforcing policies

Safety policies and programs are meaningless unless they are effectively implemented, enforced, reviewed, and if necessary, modified. Adequate resources must be made available to those in charge of the program to do this effectively and to show a true commitment to protecting workers.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term


1c. Create mechanisms for workers to voice safety concerns

Provide a climate where crew and supervisor concerns are heard and positively recognized. Suggestion boxes and call-in numbers designated for safety concerns provide workers a way to communicate their safety concerns anonymously and without fear of retaliation. Boxes in multiple locations on the site reduce barriers to using them and protect workers' anonymity. Surveys and questionnaires focused on jobsite safety are another way to solicit concerns and empower workers to share their views on safety issues anonymously.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

1d. Join daily planning meetings and safety walk-arounds and *always* wear appropriate PPE


As often as possible, owners (or their representative) should participate in daily pre-task planning meetings (or huddles) and joint site safety walk-arounds with general contractors, subcontractors, and workers. Asking field personnel for solutions to safety-related issues clearly demonstrates “walking the talk”; that is, assuming feasible suggestions are considered and acted upon by the owner. Being involved in these types of safety activities helps workers trust management’s espoused safety values.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea 2—Incorporate safety throughout the design and planning phases of the project. Some ideas include:




2a. Take safety into account when selecting and evaluating contractors

Carefully review safety programs and safety policies as well as safety performance when pre-qualifying and selecting general and subcontractors for a project. Data on lagging indicators (e.g., injuries) may reflect under-reporting rather than a strong commitment to safety. Once selected, responsibilities, expectations, and evaluation metrics based on safety climate indicators should be specified in the contract and selected contractors and subcontractors should be held accountable for meeting those expectations.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term





2b. Use Prevention through Design (PtD) methods

A PtD approach is utilized in the planning and design stages of the project to help ensure jobsite safety. Provide PtD training for in-house and contracted architects and engineers to educate them on strategies they can use to design hazards out of equipment, structures, materials, and processes that may cause hazards for workers.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term





2c. Use Building Information Modeling (BIM) techniques

BIM can be used as a planning tool that can provide valuable simulative information about a jobsite, the sequence of tasks to be performed, and potential hazards that might emerge at different stages of a project. Owners engage contractors and workers in the BIM process and encourage them to help identify potential hazards and solutions to address problems.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term

Idea 3—Align owner incentives with safety

Typically, each general and sub-contractor hired for a job purchases its own insurance (including Workers’ Compensation) and charges the owner for those costs. In an Owner Controlled Insurance Program (OCIP), the owner purchases the insurance for all parties on-site and pays directly for health care and lost time costs. Owners who use OCIPs have a strong financial incentive to address hazards before an incident occurs and may be more likely to implement programs that involve, empower, and reward workers for identifying and mitigating jobsite hazards.

-  Already Adopted
-  Short-term
-  Mid-term
-  Long-term