

NAWIC

The National Association of
Women in Construction



Safety & Health Awareness Committee

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The Importance of a Safety Culture

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On January 27, the OSHA-NAWIC Alliance and this committee hosted a joint webinar looking at OSHA changes and focuses in 2022. Marjorie Del Toro and Laura Casey knocked it out of the park with their presentations. One common theme was the importance of a safety culture in the construction workplace. Of course, workplace safety is important to you. But how important is it to your employees? If you do not know the answer to that question, it may be time to evaluate the safety culture at your business and think about what you can do to improve it.

A safety culture is the shared beliefs, practices and mindsets that shape behavior at an organization in a positive way. A safety culture sets the standard for overall safety at your company. For example, if a supervisor on a construction site runs into an area requiring hard hats “just for a moment” without his hardhat, the message is sent to all employees that PPE is not important. This unsafe behavior is perpetuated by new employees who think this is an acceptable thing to do. But if the supervisor stops to put on her hardhat before entering a restricted area, that attitude will influence the rest of the employees and create a culture of safety.

According to OSHA, an established safety culture can reduce your injury and illness costs by 20 to 40 percent. When it comes to the costs associated with safety, consider these statistics from OSHA:

- Employers pay almost \$1 billion per week for direct workers’ compensation costs alone, which comes straight out of company profits.
- Injuries and illnesses increase workers’ compensation and retraining costs.
- Lost productivity from injuries and illnesses costs companies roughly \$63 billion each year. If you have high workers’ compensation costs or your premium increases every year, analyzing the effectiveness of your company’s safety culture is a good way to start controlling these costs.

You can motivate your employees to care about safety by tying it directly to compensation or incentives. Reward employees who err on the side of safety over efficiency. But make sure you understand the difference between reward and recognition—you do not want employees doing something just because they know they will get something tangible in return. A strong safety culture with appropriate recognition and rewards will inspire employees to look out for one another and point out unsafe behaviors or situations. Everyone will feel responsible for safety and pursue it daily by going beyond the “call of duty” to identify unsafe conditions and behaviors, and to intervene to correct them.

If you have questions about creating a safety culture or want to know where to begin, reach out to the OSHA-NAWIC Alliance or this committee. We have safety professionals and resources at the ready to help you make your company as safe as possible.



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