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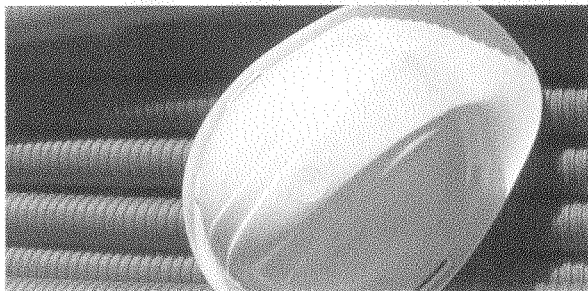
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The Site Safety Committee: Profits Driven by Safety

Giving Workers a Voice Makes Jobsites Safer

BY SCOTT JENNINGS

As a project site safety manager, if all you had to do was “safety” all day, your job would be easy. But as a safety professional, much of your time is spent convincing project managers, superintendents and executive management of the value in spending money on safety to improve the bottom line. A highly effective means of improving the bottom line with minimal cost is the implementation of a site safety committee (SSC) on your projects.

In my opinion, implementation of the SSC almost guarantees decreased costs as a result of:

- increased production rates,
- increased efficiency of the work,
- improved resource allocation,
- better cooperation between the trades, and
- decreased recordable incident rate (RIR) and experience modifier rate (EMR).

Site Safety Committees benefit all projects, regardless of the size and scope of the work. As project site safety managers, we are able to provide perspective from both angles—the project manager side concerning cost and bottom line profits and the safety side requiring compliance and safe work procedures. Presenting the principles of this article to your corporate executives and field project management is an easy sell.

Purpose, Makeup of the SSC

The purpose of the SSC is to get real-time feedback on the condition of safety and production on your job-

site. There is no better way of doing that than by inviting your field personnel to a weekly, 30-minute, on-site, lunchtime meeting. The size of your committee is dependent upon the size of your workforce. In addition to the project manager and safety manager, your committee membership should represent a cross-section of trades on your own payroll, as well as representation by any key subcontractors. A committee size of three to eight people, excluding the project manager and safety manager, is about right. Too few people does not generate discussion and too many people does not allow each person enough time to speak.

It is vital that the members be craft personnel with no management responsibility; therefore, members should not be foremen or higher. We find that employing any field manage-

ment in the meeting detracts from getting to the hard-core truth of safety and production problems that exist on the site. Workers usually warm up after a few minutes or even as long as a meeting or two, and then come forward with sometimes pretty raw, uncensored information.

The way to start the first meeting is to have the project manager explain that he/she has the overall responsibility for the site and that the purpose of the meeting is to hear it all—both the good and the bad. We often worry that stories will be abridged or incomplete because of the workers’ fear of retaliation. We immediately try to eliminate this fear by assuring the workers that information provided in the meeting will not lead to termination of employment for the person reporting the incident or unsafe act.

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(Left) Scott Jennings (project manager) and Karl Werelius (project safety officer) use a team approach to address safety concerns brought up in their site safety committees. (Above) A typical Friday site safety committee involves lunch with members talking about safety and efficiency issues. RCI provides pizza or other local food favorites weekly.

SAFETY MANAGEMENT

After the project manager has communicated this message, committee members introduce themselves by stating their craft and the area of the project where they are working. This serves as a good icebreaker and helps break down the barriers between the employees.

The Meeting

You must have an agenda that controls the flow of the meeting. One suggestion is to run down the largest hazards on your site, which may include: housekeeping, fall protection, new employees, ventilation, trench safety, work area access, and subcontractors. While most meeting agendas are written to maintain strict control of topics of discussion, the goal is to promote conversation.

Some of the notable items we have heard include:

- **Access**—It took the site superintendent tripping on an access ramp

before it was finally repaired.

- **Lax fall protection**—Subcontractors not tying off on tall rebar curtains constitutes a hazard.
- **Leading by example, or not**—Lack of safety implementation by our field supervisors did little to motivate our craft personnel to wear the proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
- **PPE selection**—Complaints about a certain brand of fall arrest harness led to changing brands for increased comfort of our workers.
- **Number and condition of small tools**—We commonly hear that we need more ladders or replacement of rigging such as slings and shackles.

At one meeting a worker casually mentioned that he had to look for a place to plug in his extension cord because all the spider boxes (multiple outlet power sources) were in use. He ended up unplugging some-

one else's cord. The other members then chimed in that they too were experiencing that problem. It seems that the process was that the worker would continue to unplug cords until no one yelled at them requesting the return of power. If they unplugged a cord and no one yelled, that meant the cord was not in use. Word got out quickly that this problem was addressed by the superintendent following the SSC discussions. As a result, more issues were brought up and taken care of at our weekly meetings.

As the concerns mount, add an action item list that is reviewed weekly. The project manager and safety manager should be held accountable for following up on the open items.

Costs

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Commentary

By George Kennedy, NUCA Vice President of Safety

The practice of having a site safety committee fits right in with having a site specific safety plan. Forming a committee helps the project manager determine if the safety plan is working properly or if it needs to be tweaked. I have always believed that the workers know more about what is taking place at a jobsite from the standpoint of safety because they are living it day after day. They know what is working, what is not working, which foremen and managers really care about safety, and who feels that safety just gets in the way. Involving workers in the site safety committees also demonstrates to all workers that safety is important to management and the workers have a say in their own well being. It has been proven time and again that workers who are actively part of the safety program realize how it benefits them and their fellow workers; therefore they all buy into the program.

It is nice to hear success stories from the field like this because they demonstrate that safety is important to workers and that everybody on the job can play a part in

the success of a safety program if management will let them. Safety-related complaints or problems observed in the field and reported to mid-level managers often fall on deaf ears or are sidelined and then forgotten because there are so many other things foremen and managers believe have a higher priority at the moment. Having a committee made up of field personnel only, who meet on a regular basis and keep minutes, ensures that the complaints or problems are made known to the project manager who is the primary responsible person at the job and can therefore make changes and make things happen.

I say to company owners and project managers, take note, this is an effective way to gain better control of your site-specific safety program, at little or no cost to your company. Make the commitment to participate. It is a small investment of time, it will improve worker relationships, it will help you identify potential problems that go beyond safety, it will save money in the long haul, but most importantly it will make your jobsite a safe place to work.

I commend Scott Jennings and his fellow workers at RCI Construction Group for a job well done. Keep up the good work.

easy because the costs associated with this implementation are little to none.

Depending on your workforce, union or non-union, different work rules will apply. We have a voluntary committee that meets during their Friday lunch break. We always provide lunch to the members. We meet on the jobsite, so there is no lost time. Wherever you choose to have the meeting, the room should be clean and comfortable for the members.

Conclusion

The SSC has been an integral part of making our jobsites safer and more efficient. Just by giving the workers a voice, they have taken ownership in the project. We sleep better at night knowing that they have a better pulse on the job. All safety managers will tell you that safety and production go hand in hand, and the implementation of an SSC is a testament to this adage. **UC**

Scott Jennings, PE is a project manager for RCI Construction Group in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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