

4 Strategies to Avoiding Rising OSHA Fines in Construction

Risk management is an inherent part of the job in the construction industry. As a contractor, the thought of an OSHA inspection and possible violations probably makes you a little nervous. Even worse is the possibility of an incident on one of your jobsites that results in serious harm to employees.

The government doesn't take incidents like this lightly, as evidenced by the fact that the cost of penalties levied by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is rising. In 2016, OSHA increased its penalties for the first time since 1990. Going forward, penalties will rise annually on January 1 to keep up with inflation. That means that at the beginning of 2018, a serious or failure to abate penalty, for example, rose from \$12,615 to \$12,934. This year, willful or repeat violations will cost nearly \$130,000. When contractors have tight budgets and deadlines, those numbers can really add up, impacting job costs and the organization's bottom line.

Increases in Criminal Charges

We're also beginning to see more criminal charges against companies and individuals responsible for jobsite deaths. A construction company in Seattle is currently facing charges after an employee died in a trench collapse. A similar incident occurred in New York, and the contractor and subcontractor were charged with manslaughter. In that case, individuals working on the site were also held responsible after ignoring safety warnings.

Companies that don't fix safety issues are at risk of higher penalties, and those that don't learn from past mistakes also risk much more serious incidents. For example, five employees recently died in an explosion at a Pittsburgh drilling company that had violated OSHA safety regulations in the past.

Safety is a serious matter. Obviously, you want to protect your employees from serious harm and you also want to protect your business from serious consequences. There is no need to panic and stress about something terrible happening, though, because there are concrete steps you can take to reduce risk and protect people, property, and your business. Here are four construction safety strategies to consider:

1. Know the OSHA Regulations

The first thing to do is learn OSHA's safety standards for construction. Some standards are different for construction than they are for other industries, so make sure you consult the correct regulations. These standards include topics like fall protection, trench safety, personal protective equipment (PPE), use of scaffolding and aerial lifts, and the safe operation of vehicles. Make sure you know which safety issues pertain to your jobsites.

? 2. Train, and Put Safety Practices in Place on the Jobsite

In addition to knowing which safety issues your business is responsible for, you also need to know what types of training are required and how frequently these trainings need to be repeated.

OSHA offers a variety of training materials and resources to help businesses comply with training requirements.

Jobsite safety goes beyond required trainings, though. Leading contractors strive to create a workplace culture where people don't cut corners with safety issues. Regular check-ins with employees about how work is progressing and about the safety issues they encounter are key, as are reminders to use appropriate safety gear. Getting people in the habit of doing things the right way can prevent incidents from occurring.

3. Conduct Regular Inspections

In construction, many parts of a job need to be inspected regularly. Daily checks of equipment, tools, scaffolding, and other aspects of the jobsite are critical. Keep a list of what needs to be inspected when, and make sure the right people are in place to conduct these inspections. Plus, it's important that regular checks and inspections don't just become a quick exercise in checking off boxes. Inspections should be thorough if they're going to be effective.

4. Improve Recordkeeping With Construction Software

If you're doing site inspections at appropriate intervals and reducing risks, that's great. But sometimes, accidents still happen. If an incident does occur, you'll need documentation to prove safety inspections have actually been completed. When you can demonstrate with written records that safety inspections were performed, you're less likely to be held liable when something happens.

Many companies worry about inspection records getting lost in the field—or not getting completed in the first place. To ensure compliance and protect the organization, many contractors rely on

powerful document management solutions that store digital versions of all project documentation, with versioning control, and make them quickly accessible when they're needed.

Viewpoint Team™ is one of these solutions. This collaborative, cloud-based project management software features a powerful solution for organizing, sharing, and collaborating on project documents, anywhere, any time. While Viewpoint for Field View™ is a cloud-based mobile solution integrated with Viewpoint Team™ to easily capture, share, and report data in the field digitally.

Replacing pen and paper with digital solutions like these helps you keep track of all field reporting including safety, quality, and project delivery information. When you need to consult records of inspections or access safety-related documentation in a pinch, you won't have any problem finding them.

Have questions about how you can reduce risk and avoid OSHA violations with software?

Contact us through our website or get in touch on LinkedIn.