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AUGUST 2011

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# A TEAM APPROACH TO SAFETY

When it comes to safety, there are no shortcuts.

BY DAVID SKINNER AND MELANIE TUNGET



The senior management of LCS Constructors Inc. (LCS) founded the company with a personal commitment to maintaining a safe work environment for its employees and to delivering a safe work environment to the end users of the facilities we build. We believe our attention to safety is ethically responsible, but we understand it is also good business.

Our experience has taught us that the company's focus on excellence in safety performance delivers superior service to our customers, not to mention a project that is delivered on-time and within budget. LCS routinely makes all aspects of its safety programs, policies, manuals and records available to facility owners in order to demonstrate our commitment in both word and deed.

When beginning any construction project, safety is often considered the responsibility of the contractor, not the burden of facility owner. Yet in reality, starting any construction project can be overwhelming to facility owners who also face many risks during a construction project at their facility. Owners and managers must be concerned over a variety of potential risks to employees, tenants, property, the surrounding community and the contractor.

Reducing the risks associated with construction can significantly reduce overall project cost. Safety is not only a concern for the obvious reasons – risk of injuries or death and damage to property – but it can serve as a standard for the project delivery team's management of all aspects of the job, including quality control, schedule, maintenance and cost control. If both parties – owner and contractor – are



# Safety is not only a concern for the obvious reasons, but it can serve as a standard for the project delivery team's management of the job.

committed to safety, the results have proven to be that the safest jobs are consistently the most profitable jobs.

Contractors face great risks with any project, both financial risk and risk of performance by third parties, all of which can add substantial expense to the contract and potentially decrease probable profits. Every contractor must evaluate and then take steps to mitigate these potential losses when developing their project budget for any contract; and like most businesses, contractors must make a profit to stay in business. Therefore, including these risks is a must.

While it is the responsibility of the contractor's management team to enforce and ensure that safety procedures are followed, it is essentially the responsibility of each employee to embrace safety practices and make them part of their daily routine. Because LCS specializes in the construction of the laboratory and technical facilities, we bring the knowledge of an industry that can present many dangers and challenges to each project. Proper use of personal protective safety equipment, knowledge of OSHA and ANSI safety regulations, and keeping a tidy work area are key elements to ensuring everyone's safety.

So, what does this mean for facility owners? Contractors are mandated by law to comply with local, state and federal regulations and are required to execute various safety procedures in order to avoid pricey losses resulting from

injuries. Facility owners can stipulate that contractors provide proper safety program documentation and execution to protect employees working on the job site.

Contractors who are successful in preventing injuries will reduce their overhead costs of insurance and significantly reduce the hidden costs of accidents, essentially bringing more profit dollars back to the contractor and reducing the costs passed on to the owner. Simply put, if a contractor has an exemplary workers' compensation safety record, the construction firm is more capable of reducing risks, more profitable, completes more projects on time, has less rework and most importantly, is actively working to reduce the construction risks to the owner of the project.

Owners play a key role in this process by recognizing the advantage a good contractor's safety program can bring to a project. Owners have the power to hire and demand contractors actively and successfully control their risks through comprehensive safety programs, thus resulting in reduced hazards and injury potential and increased construction costs.

Unfortunately though, it is not uncommon for non-industrial owners to feel they are interfering with the contractor's general business if specific standards or concerns are expressed about jobsite safety. Owners should be clear that they have the right to demand, and should demand, the selected contractor have a safety program in place. The owner can incorporate safety requirements into the construction contract to ensure their concerns are addressed and will be managed appropriately.

LCS takes safety seriously and remains committed to safe work habits and safe work environments. Safety is a way of life and there are no short cuts; it is part of our routine and this routine creates a continued cultural safety. We employ safety officers, provide safety education programs, perform weekly safety meetings and remain current on the latest safety regulations – as well as perform a daily safety hazard assessment of each planned task – all of which contribute to an exemplary safety record.

Facility owners can easily pre-qualify a contractor by comparing their safety record and other company statistics and information to the competition. However, owners should keep in mind that the initial bid package of a contractor with a good safety record will often be priced higher than their competitor. The final cost should be factored into the decision making process keeping in mind that poor safety compliance will increase the owner's risks and can drive up the final costs of a completed contract.

In examining the owner and contractor relationship, this relationship ideally should be viewed as a partnership; owners need their projects completed and contractors need work, thus relying on each other in order to be successful. Ideally, an owner should choose to be involved in the project, otherwise they risk primary project control falling into the hands of the contractor.

Owner involvement is not without a time investment. However, the incentives are worth the extra time spent, resulting in a less stressful construction process as well as a project that is delivered on time and within budget. Additionally, the more time spent on the front end of the project will result in less time spent dealing with challenges throughout the project and control of risks.

It is important for facility owners to understand the role they can and should play in their project. By establishing a relationship with a quality contractor, each party shares a common goal – to safely, economically and successfully complete a project. ♦

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