

# Safety and Competence in the Construction Sector

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Within the Barbadian construction sector there is a gap between what safety and health is in theory and the execution of the policies and procedures among line workers. While management and safety officers (where available) may understand in full or in part the true essence of safety and health, this information has seemingly not trickled down to the line workers. Companies within their scope of works should aim to increase the knowledge base of these workers and ensure competence using practical learning tools which meet the needs of these individuals. The Health and Safety Executive defines competence as 'the combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely'.

While there is a need for these skills, employers' have found it difficult to set aside the resources needed to invest in such a program for their organisation. With the funding through institutions such as the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council and the Competency-Based Training Fund (CBTF) employers' can now find relief in knowing that there are such entities willing to invest in such projects.

While company-wide training is needed in an industry such as the construction sector – prone to accidents and incidents, this is not always feasible. Companies should seek to employ safe systems of work where employees can be trained by supervisors and managers via tool-box talks, on-the-job assessments and reviews of work practices. The managers and supervisors themselves must therefore undergo adequate training in order to sufficiently and efficiently equip these individuals with the relevant skills and knowledge to conduct their assigned tasks. When there is effective supervision an efficient work cycle is guaranteed.

In the long term this training can dramatically change the way these employees operate in their work environment. Additionally, it should be the goal of these companies to work towards and achieve international operational standards in the industry such as ASTM International, formerly known as the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and City and Guilds. When such standards are achieved companies can pursue regional and international contracts. In this current global economy businesses can no longer be satisfied with local business only, but avidly seek to export their skills and expertise abroad. Ensuring that your employees understand the principles of working safely is a step in the right direction.

Section 6(6)(c) of The Safety and Health at Work Act instructs all employers through training to ensure the safety, health and well-being of their employees. Bearing this in mind, how can an employer ensure that the training process is successful? An effective training program is built by following a systematic, step-by step process. Training initiatives that are random and sporadic often fail to meet organizational objectives and participant expectations. Here are five necessary steps to creating an effective program from assessing needs to evaluating and revising training.

**1) Assess Training Needs:** The first step in developing a training program is to identify and assess needs. It is important to place high priority on tasks which by their nature carry a high risk level.

**2) Set Organizational Training Objectives:** The ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between current and desired performance through the development of a training program. At the employee level, the training should match the areas of improvement discovered through risk assessment and workplace inspections.

**3) Create A Training Action Plan:** Here your resources and training delivery methods should also be detailed. While developing the program, the level of training and participants' learning styles need to also be considered. Additionally, due diligence must be exercised in the selection of the trainer. A pilot may be necessary to gather feedback so adjustments can be made before launching the program company-wide.

**4) Implement Training Initiatives:** Program implementation includes the scheduling of training activities and organization of any related resources (facilities, equipment, etc.). It is important to schedule training in such a way so there will be little impact on the project time schedule. During training, participant progress should be monitored to ensure that the program is effective.

**5) Evaluate & Revise Training:** Feedback should be obtained from all stakeholders to determine its effectiveness. An examination of knowledge and skill acquisition is also necessary. Analysing this feedback will allow the organization to identify any weaknesses in the program. At this point, the training program or action plan can be revised if objectives or expectations are not being met.

Remember, successful safety management is not a destination it's a journey, therefore everyone must play their part.