

Above and Beyond: Your Guide to Olympic-Level Construction Safety

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In the realm of EHS management, stakes can vary to the extreme. Sometimes, it's about making small tweaks to the workplace setting so that employees experience more comfortable temperatures, or ease the strain on their necks and backs. Other times, it can literally be a matter of life and death.

Construction safety is one focus that falls in the latter bucket. According to OSHA, construction-related incidents accounted for roughly one out of five workplace fatalities in 2019. This tragic outcome is, to an extent, the unavoidable reality in an inherently dangerous profession. But EHS managers and business leaders can absolutely take proactive and preventative risk mitigation steps that save lives and help protect their organization's reputation.

Right now feels like an especially important time to lean into this imperative. Let's review some tips and best practices to make sure you're doing all you can in promoting construction safety.

Construction Safety in Data Centers & Beyond

Construction projects are constantly taking place all around the world, with a multitude of different purposes and functions. But one key area of focus presently is the data center, which is experiencing a tremendous amount of growth as data requirements rapidly increase. **According to a ResearchAndMarkets.com report**, the data center construction market is expected to register a compound annual growth rate of 8.63% over the next five years, jumping from \$8.4 billion in 2020 to a projected \$13.9 billion in 2026.

The scale and speed of these initiatives should not come at the expense of safety and risk management. It cannot. Thankfully, industry leaders in tech are setting a heightened standard for others to follow.

We've seen this first-hand with our clients at Antea Group. Leading enterprises are going above and beyond, treating OSHA requirements as the minimum standard and implementing practices that elevate well beyond current regulatory thresholds.

"They don't want just minimum requirements, they want best-in-class," says **John Whalen**, an EHS Project Manager at Antea Group who works with one top tech company to assist their data center construction and safety oversight.

Let's draw some tips from how companies like these approach construction safety to help inspire others who wish to aim for exceptional rather than acceptable with their risk management measures. Whether you're involved with the construction of a data center or a donut shop, most of this guidance will apply.

The New Best Practices for Construction Safety

A recent article at EHS Today shares advice on **improving and promoting safety in construction**, and talks about the value of creating a "safety culture." When everyone buys into the importance of health and safety processes, and thinks about them actively whenever they're on the job, you're far more likely to minimize accidents and injuries.

These steps can help your organization actualize a culture of safety during construction projects:

Proactivity is Everything: Plan Vigorously and Relentlessly

There is no such thing as too much planning. The best way to minimize the negative impact of construction incidents is to prevent them. Investing time and resources into this phase up-front will likely save you considerable time and trouble later on.

Think through the project comprehensively to spot problem points ahead of time. Build robust and instantaneous communication channels. Consider supplying devices and technologies like Google Glass, HoloLens, and drones if they can help.

Subtle choices can make a big difference. For instance, many safety-minded organizations adopt a “ladders last” philosophy, where ladders are considered only as a final option for situations that require reaching or working in elevated places. We’ve helped clients incorporate safety-by-design techniques such as light bulbs that lower down with a mechanism to be changed. Mobile elevators are another option. Again, investing up-front can ultimately save a lot of headache and heartache.

Scrutinize the Company You Keep

An organization or manager might be genuinely obsessed with safety, but if the partners they work with don’t share that priority, it may not make much of a difference.

Screen your providers, suppliers, and contractors against specific criteria, assessing based on factors such as Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR). If they’ve experienced fatalities, work to understand what happened, how they responded afterward, and what’s being done to prevent any future incidents. Aim to hire high-performing health and safety professionals to administer and run safety programs.

If you want a best-in-class safety standard, you’ve got to partner with the best of the best.

Get Leadership Involved and Vocal

Safety is better implemented when leadership cares about it, and shows it. This sets an example and cements the matter’s urgency. In the case of the aforementioned major tech company, executives are extremely engaged — they join safety meetings, they ask hard questions, and they make a point of staying informed. This permeates to managers across the operation.

“Safety is discussed as the leading topic on every call I have with them,” John says. “If there’s an incident or injury, these guys are on it.”

Get Serious About Construction Safety

The data center boom is only one trend that is fueling a robust outlook for the construction industry in the post-pandemic years ahead. Meanwhile, safety technology and methods are improving, and scrutiny from investors and customers is ramping up. It’s clear that health and safety should be a top priority for projects moving forward, and

those who implement and adhere to high standards now will be in a strong position down the line.

If you are looking for expert outside support in planning and executing your own construction projects safely and successfully, Antea Group offers a variety of services ranging from pre-screenings to planning, goal-setting, assessments, compliance reviews, and even on-site EHS oversight during construction builds.

Ready to get serious? Contact us today.

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