

# WHITE

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Representing QUOIN Contractor Members

**M**ission possible or impossible? Can safety in our industry be moved to a higher level? And if so, what will it take to go the extra mile? Safety leaders have tried to answer these questions for years and while some of us think we know the answers or have seen some progress, why has dramatic change and improvement been so elusive?

What we have learned is that achieving zero incidents 100% of the time is not an easy task, especially when you have multiple people constantly changing from one jobsite to another. This is complicated further by accelerated project schedules and minimal time to train new workers or retrain our existing workforce. As much as we would like one simple solution to improve safety, we have come to grips with the fact that it will require a set of complex, interrelated strategies and solutions all working together to bring about real change.

Improving safety requires effort and commitment by everyone at a company. Safety is everyone's job and not just the responsibility of the Safety Director.

Making everyone responsible for their own safety and the safety of those around them requires more than just a "safety program" – regardless of how effective it is. A big part of the solution has to do with a company's ethics and



# PAPER Best Practices in Construction Safety

## *Accepting the Challenge of Moving Safety to a Higher Level*

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values and how it goes about treating people and conducting itself as a business enterprise. Thus, culture and leadership play a big part in transitioning to a higher level in safety.

Most important, we believe that being safe is the morally right thing to do. Taking steps to be as safe as possible also makes as much common sense as it does business sense. Setting high safety goals and achieving them is all about sending home an injury-free workforce each day with no incidents, no fatalities and no near misses. It is also about not having to be the bearer of bad news to any family member or loved one.

Of course, the biggest cost of all in being unsafe is the loss of human life or a debilitating or life-long injury. In addition to the impact on this person and their family, unsafe work conditions also affects workforce morale and the ability of our industry to attract and retain new workers to the field. A reputation for unsafe work practices also affects the image of an entire industry, a region, a general contractor, a specialty contractor, or even a particular superintendent or foreman overseeing a jobsite. Add in higher costs of insurance and lost days of productivity and it is easy to make the case for a sense of urgency in taking new steps to improve safety regardless of how well a company thinks it is doing now.

### **SAFETY PAYS IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE!**

Despite impressive safety gains by QUOIN contractor members in recent years, the ability to go from “good to

great” has remained a challenge. Even though many of us have achieved anywhere from 92 to 96% effectiveness in safety, when it comes to human lives, we know this is not good enough. We have worked diligently together for years in the Chapter’s safety committee and later in safety forums trying to find the one secret that would make a difference and elevate our existing safety program to a much higher level. New ideas have been introduced, obstacles have been identified and solutions have been shared for what we believe it will take to go the extra mile in bringing safety to a new level.

The result of our collaboration includes twelve best-in-class industry practices that we believe will lead to zero incidents and 100% effectiveness in safety.

### **BEST-IN-CLASS INDUSTRY PRACTICES**

#### **1. Demonstrated Management**

##### **Commitment and Involvement**

Engage company leaders in playing an active role in safety whether it is communicating the safety message, visiting jobsites to observe safety behavior, singling out and recognizing an individual’s “safe” behavior, or making sure that adequate resources are available to support the desired safety goals. Clearly, management sets the tone for safety and their commitment to a safe workplace is the example others will follow.

#### **2. Zero Tolerance of Unsafe Behavior**

When it comes to safety, a line in the sand has to be drawn on what you

expect and what you are willing to tolerate. To truly achieve zero incidents and injuries, there is no middle ground. You are either behaving safely or you are not. Accepting or turning a blind eye to unsafe behavior only perpetuates an unsafe workplace. Removing unsafe workers from a jobsite is a powerful way to get your message across that you are serious when it comes to safety. All it takes is one unsafe act to cause a fatality.

### 3. Ongoing Safety Education and Training

People can only be responsible for what they know and are trained to do. Safety knowledge is important for field personnel and everyone else in the company. Project managers, project engineers and even the president of a company who visits a jobsite need safety education to properly model and encourage safe behavior. In addition to traditional classroom training, we have to find

new ways of bringing safety education to our jobsites. We are encouraged to minimize the lecture approach in favor of “learning by doing” since this is preferred by most adults. Integrating safety education into our daily interactions with workers can be done by pointing out what they are doing safe and where they can improve.

### 4. Observe and Document “Safe” and “Unsafe” Behaviors

Historically, the construction industry has focused solely on the observation, reporting and documentation of “unsafe” behaviors. Safety violations and the penalties associated with these violations have long been in the limelight. Now to properly assess safety results, attention is turning to the thousands of “safe” practices going on every day at jobsites. This will help to properly contrast and compare “unsafe” practices. New methodologies are available to assist contractors in tracking leading safety indicators to help us predict and prevent safety injuries before they happen. (see related article about the new SafetyNet program on page 4).

### 5. Reward and Recognition of Safe Practices

Basic psychology teaches that people behave in a way congruent with how they are rewarded and recognized. Another words, we get the behavior that we reward and recognize. We believe it is still a good idea to celebrate company-wide safety achievements and recognize an entire construction team for safe behavior. However, we believe it is just as important to seek out and recognize individual safety performers who help make a difference to overall jobsite safety. This might include recognition for an experienced worker who takes a new person under their wing to coach them on safety. Or it might include a project manager who walked the jobsite with a superintendent and took the time to praise one or more workers for tying off properly.

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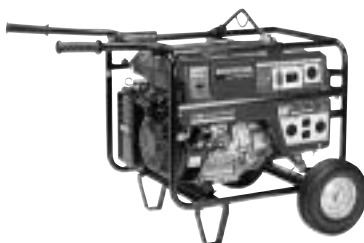
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**“Being safe is the morally right thing to do.”**

### **6. Worker Involvement and Participation**

Safety is about the workforce and employees taking ownership for their own safe behavior as well as the safety of others around them. Individuals responsible for safety often have the best ideas or solutions on how to go about creating a safer work environment. The fastest way to get buy-in for anything including safety is to involve people themselves in coming up with the safety measures they want to see at a particular jobsite. Get your people talking about safety and see to it that a safety dialogue continues. Identify jobsite leaders who report each week on “what is being done well in safety” and “where they see the biggest opportunity to improve.”

### **7. Attract, Recruit and Retain Healthy and Safety-Minded Workers**

Selection criteria and hiring practices have a lot to do with the workforce that is put in place on any given construction jobsite. In addition to initial and random drug and alcohol testing, what other up-front screening measures are in place to assure that workers being hired are individuals who value good health and safety for themselves as well as those around them. If safety and health is not coming up in job interviews, then maybe we are settling for “bodies” to fill job openings rather than workers who will help us achieve our safety goals. The same is true when a general contractor qualifies a specialty contractor. What criteria are in place to bring only safety-minded specialty contractors onto a jobsite? And are specialty contractors showing a preference for working with proactive, safety-minded general contractors? Putting the right team together is key.

### **8. Safety Planning**

Putting a written safety plan together for a company helps to get everyone on the same page about

safety goals and the strategies being used to reach these goals. Input into this plan from the field as well as the office is critical to the plan’s success. In addition to safety planning by the company, each construction project requires advance planning to address site-specific safety issues and to build in safety measures on the front end of a job. As the landscape changes day to day on a project, up-front planning will help workers make adjustments in their safety behavior.

### **9. Measure Safety Progress**

Once safety goals are established, it helps to measure progress against these goals. Historically, construction projects report how many days are worked injury free as well as the number of lost days due to accidents or injuries. Consider setting a zero recordable injury rate goal at the outset of a project or at the beginning of a company’s fiscal year, and report progress against this goal. Consider setting a goal of working



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352 days without any lost time and report lost days against this number. Set positive, quantifiable, specific goals and make everyone aware of these goals and understand the part they play individually in helping to achieve these goals. Instead of reporting performance, establish goals and measure progress against these goals.

### 10. Build a High-Performing Jobsite Safety Team

Building a team around safety is just as important if not more important than building a team to deliver a project on time and within budget. Bringing team members on board who have a commitment to safety will help get the team off to a good start. Setting project safety goals, communicating and clarifying safety expectations for all team members, and creating opportunities for open feedback about safety performance will help the team perform stronger in safety. The project manager and superintendent provide the team with safety leadership who are then responsible to help the team perform well in this area. While the accountability for safety is ultimately demonstrated on the front line or in the field, it takes an entire company to deliver the proper training and put in place the processes, policies and procedures to insure a safe worksite.


### 11. Develop Safety Leaders

Safety leadership can be cultivated throughout a company and everywhere on a jobsite. Leadership is all about bringing out the best in ourselves as well as the people around us. And when it comes to safety, leadership has to do with first holding ourselves accountable before we look to others. Through our actions, new leaders and safety champions are encouraged to come forward to help us achieve safety goals. Again safety is a shared leadership responsibility that no one person can achieve working on their own. Effective leaders communicate well, encourage positive behavior, recognize achievements, develop people, inspire action, and

most of all set an example for others to follow. Become a “safety coach” and not a “safety cop.”

### 12. Meet and Exceed OSHA Standards

A company’s safety goals need to extend beyond a desire to just meet OSHA standards since OSHA guidelines represent the minimum acceptable level of safety performance. Helping a workforce set higher safety goals is key to moving

safety to a much higher level. Contractors that seek out and develop good working relationships with OSHA representatives are learning that this is a win-win for everyone. 

This paper is possible due to the dedication, experience and many contributions of hundreds of safety leaders who have worked tirelessly in QUOIN’s Safety Forums to move safety to a higher level to benefit their company and the industry.



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