

Effective Strategies for Reinforcing Safety Into Evolving Design Standards

Written by: Ethan Harris, Senior Safety Manager, Brinkmann Constructors

From design-build condos to built-to-suit warehouses, one factor remains the highest priority regardless of the project type – the approach to upholding the highest level of safety. Safety exists as a core value across all areas of the construction industry, but the increased risk of serious injuries or fatalities persists. Ranked fourth on the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' list of occupations with the most fatality rates, construction workers put their lives in danger each time they step onto the jobsite.

Considering this risk, it's important for every team member – from trade partners to superintendents – to take responsibility for safety compliance, empowering their workforce to take ownership of their own actions and hold others accountable for theirs. To help enhance safety efforts from start to completion, safety leaders are focusing on ways to implement safety standards within each component of a building's design. Although this approach requires more comprehensive planning and strategizing on the front end, it is intended to reduce and mitigate hazards before they become larger issues. Keeping this idea in mind, here are a few actionable methods for managing projects designed around safety compliance.

ASSESS FIRST

No two jobsites are the same. From crowded pedestrian walkways to dangerous existing infrastructure, each project



requires specific layouts, materials, and processes to be fully functional both during and after construction. Given the unique nature of each site, a detailed risk assessment must be conducted before any other design and/or building activities begin. During this initial assessment, careful consideration should be placed on the overall flow as it relates to the people, processes, and equipment located on or near the construction site.

PLAN SECOND

The initial risk assessment also serves as the foundation for developing site-specific safety plans. By creating a detailed plan that aligns with the distinct jobsite needs and

requirements, the team is able to understand, identify and address any safety issue that can occur on a specific project. A well-developed, site-specific safety plan outlines all project procedures and guidelines related to safety, including clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, personal protective equipment requirements, mandatory training programs, audit and inspection information, an emergency response plan, reporting requirements, and more. This proactive approach not only demonstrates a company's commitment to making safety the top priority on every jobsite, but it also serves as a strategic way to promote compliance and minimize the likelihood of serious accidents.


REINFORCE FALL PROTECTION

According to OSHA, falls are the leading cause of work-related injuries and deaths on jobsites. This fact underscores the importance of fall protection standards when planning a project centered on safety excellence. By proactively approaching fall protection with tools such as guardrails, handrails, safety nets, harnesses, toe boards, and floor-hole covers, workers can stay protected from serious injuries or fatalities that result from a devastating fall. Implementing fall protection solutions goes beyond protecting workers. By creating an environment that supports physical well-being, workers are more confident in completing daily tasks, resulting in increased efficiency and productivity overall.

USE HIGH-QUALITY MATERIALS

Certain building materials create greater health and safety concerns for both construction workers and future building occupants. Some materials contain toxic components that present an increased risk of flammability, chemical exposure, and other severe health complications. Although a seemingly minor aspect when it comes to overall construction safety, these materials can have serious consequences long after construction is complete. Be sure to investigate the potential hazards of each material used on a project, from paints and adhesives to doors and windows.

Durability is another important consideration when selecting safety-focused building materials. High-quality materials will be more likely to withstand adverse weather conditions and environmental changes, resulting in less frequent maintenance and repairs – the need for which could create an opportunity for worksite injuries.

Refining the approach to safety on construction sites will remain an ongoing priority for industry leaders and frontline workers as they actively plan, design, and build. To follow through on this priority, a safety-focused mindset must be ingrained into each phase of the project, from procurement to design, to topping out. By making safety a key design element, both the project and those bringing it to life will benefit from a culture where safety is not just a goal but a shared, non-negotiable value guiding each aspect of the work, from preconstruction to closeout and beyond. 



About the Author

Ethan Harris is a senior safety manager at [Brinkmann Constructors](#), and has worked in the construction industry for 17 years. In this position, Ethan coordinates seamless collaboration between the project and safety teams to ensure full compliance with all health and safety procedures.

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