

A Joint Labor-Management Health and Safety Model: Lessons Learned at the World Trade Center Emergency Project

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INTRODUCTION

The partnership among contractors, unions, workers, owners, and OSHA was crucial in protecting worker health and safety at the WTC Emergency Project. Over a 9 month period, more than 2,000 construction workers put in 3.7 million work hours. Only 57 lost-time injuries occurred—none of which were life threatening. What has been called the country's most dangerous construction project was completed with an injury rate less than the national average and without the loss of a single life.

Sadly, since September 11th, 31 construction workers at projects in New York and New Jersey have been killed on the job. An ironworker fell from a new building going up in midtown, a dockbuilder was crushed while handling foundation materials, and several workers were killed in scaffold collapses. Each year in the US, nearly 1,200 construction workers die on the job. More than 70% of these deaths are caused by falls, falling materials, crushing accidents, and electrocutions. These same hazards were ever present at the WTC site.

LESSONS LEARNED

This partnership worked because of:

- management commitment to do the work as safely as possible

- skill and dedication of union construction workers
- support and involvement of union stewards and elected leaders
- health and safety expertise of contractor and agency personnel
- OSHA support

Construction fatalities are preventable—that's been shown at the WTC Emergency Project. The challenge to the construction industry now is to muster this same level of partnership and commitment for the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan and at construction projects throughout the metropolitan area. The WTC partnership is characterized by:

- Management commitment
- Skill
- Immediate abatement of health and safety hazards
- Support and involvement of union stewards and elected union leaders
- Health
- Active labor-management health and safety committee
- OSHA support

The same attributes are transferable to other construction projects and are crucial for future OSHA partnership agreements.

Labor-Management Model for Health and Safety in Construction

A model for labor-management health and safety efforts in construction that enhances the expertise and resources of all partners—contractors, workers and their unions, owners, and health and safety professionals is needed. It has long been recognized that the best way to protect worker's health and safety is through programs that are based on management

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commitment and worker involvement. The following model, adapted from the WTC Emergency Project, can provide a starting point for discussion about this important issue within our industry.

Structure and Function of the Labor-Management Model—Adapted From the WTC Project

- Establishment of a joint labor-management committee
 - Support of leadership of both contractors and unions
 - Participation of site staff
 - Training for committee members
 - Structure: Representative, balanced, rotating chair
 - Action item agenda; Meeting minutes; accountability
 - Regular site tours
- Steward health and safety network
 - Information exchange up and down the site
- Communication bulletins and tool box talks
 - Foremen and stewards need up to date, project-specific information
- Site Training: Orientation and specialized programs
 - Many local and international unions have comprehensive training programs that can be adapted to specific projects and can provide needed safety and health information
 - Opportunities to collaborate with union and contractor association programs
 - Training for management and union representatives on health and safety committees and working within an OSHA partnership

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