

**Topic:** The Importance of Health and Safety (H&S) in Construction

**Speaker:** Mr. John Wachira, Construction Manager

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## **Introduction**

Construction work is regarded as one of the most dangerous professions. However, on site construction work can be considered anything but entirely safe. The employer and the project team needs to mitigate safety hazards to construction workers, but the workers need to keep in mind a lot of precautions when working in such hazardous conditions to avoid and prevent possible injuries and accidents which may result in loss of lives, time and even budget overruns.

Health and safety in construction is not a matter to be taken lightly. The construction industry is prone to many hazards and accident potential. Construction materials, tools, machinery and handling techniques all come with their own dangers. The main types of accidents which cause death or serious injury on construction sites include falls, incidents with site vehicles, collapsing materials and contact with overhead power lines. Most accidents can be avoided by implementing stringent health and safety protocols and ensuring those protocols are constantly maintained. H&S methods will ensure the construction site has good design, good planning and uses tried and tested safety techniques.

There is simply no excuse for slacking or cutting corners when it comes to health and safety in construction. Poorly implemented health and safety techniques, design and management can result in accidents, illness and even death.

Therefore, leaders in the construction industry must safeguard their employees for ethical and economic reasons.

Key areas to consider in order to improve health and safety in construction sites are;

- **General Practices to Improve Construction Site Safety**

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- **Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.)**

## **General Practices to Improve Construction Site Safety**

### **1. Awareness**

Before any worker – no matter his or her role or experience level – can set foot on a construction site, he or she must be fully cognizant of the possible hazards. Ignorant workers are perhaps the biggest dangers in any industry, as their unknowing mistakes put everyone else at risk. Understanding of perils at hand and sustaining a perpetual state of alertness is perhaps the number-one best way to prevent accidents.

### **2. Training**

Though most of a construction worker's skills can be gained on the job, safety is one skill set that is best learned before works enter the construction site. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and other organizations publish some resources to help businesses train their new laborers on standard safety and security practices, including pamphlets, worksheets, training videos, and even on-site training opportunities. Experienced workers should be expected to refresh their knowledge of standard safety by attending regular training sessions throughout the year.

### **3. Communication**

Accidents are more likely to occur when workers are unsure what to expect. Direct communication regarding the day's goals and activities will cut down on surprises that could cause bodily harm. Construction firms would be wise to equip workers with devices, like smartphones or headsets, which allow fast and efficient communication among team members.

### **4. Documentation**

There are some legal hoops most construction companies must jump through to begin building, and it is essential that all proper registrations and licenses are earned before

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work begins. Supervisors and contractors who will be charged with particularly difficult tasks, like blasting, certainly should provide evidence of their certification well in advance of their employment on the job site. Not only does this prevent accidents due to improper training, but it protects the construction firm from legal action and public scrutiny.

## 5. Proper Personal Protective Equipment

Construction workers equipped with improper gear are bound to make fatal errors. Not only should each piece of equipment on the job site be ideally suited to the task at hand, but construction firms must make certain that all machinery and material are well maintained.

Construction companies must also consider equipment that doesn't directly contribute to the construction project. Workers should have plenty of water on-site as well as a shady place to prevent dehydration and exposure-related illnesses. Longer construction projects may even benefit from fabric structures to store equipment and cover incomplete sites.

## 6. Supervision

Ideally, construction workers would fully understand the ramifications of inadequate safety precautions and thus act in a manner to ensure site-wide well-being – but this is not a perfect world. Every site must have a strong supervisor who is willing and capable of enforcing safety standards with no exceptions. This foreman must keep tabs on all employees throughout the day and correct those who fail to commit to proper safety procedures.

## 7. Innovation

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The accident rate would be even higher than it is today if it were not for construction firms willing to devote extra resources to keep their employees safe. The development of new practices that will enhance security should always be encouraged, and companies should avoid speaking against legislation aimed at improving safety protocols. Perhaps with enough innovation, all construction sites can be 100 percent accident-free.

### 8. Transparency

The worst thing any construction firm can do for its reputation is attempting a cover-up. Hiding accidents from the press and the public not only lowers the opinion of a single endeavor – it paints the building industry as a whole in a negative light. Ultimately, people understand that accidents happen, and as long as contractors are doing their best to foster a safe environment for their workers, any accidents that do occur will only contribute to the growing need to augment modern safety techniques. Transparency, along with the other seven practices on this list, will help construction as a whole become a safer industry in which to work.

### Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.)

- Workers should be provided with Personal Protective Equipment and the know-how to use it properly.
- PPE includes a variety of devices and garments to protect workers from injuries, due to exposure to work environment hazards.
- Most PPEs are designed to protect: - Eyes, face, head, ears, feet, hands and arms, and whole body.
- PPE includes such items as- Goggles, Face shields, Safety glasses, Helmets, Safety shoes, Respirators, Gloves, Vests, Earplugs, and Earmuffs.
- PPE must be provided if the work environment and the work process during normal work, a substance presents a hazard or is likely to present a hazard to any part of an employee's body and when it is not possible to eliminate the exposure or potential

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exposure to the hazard by engineering, through safe work practices, or by administrative controls

## Full Body Protection

- Full body protection includes; Vests, jackets, aprons, overalls, full body suits among others.
- To provide full body protection against toxic substances or harmful physical agents, one must: Inspect the clothing carefully, ensure proper fit, and make sure the protective clothing functions properly.

## Materials for PPE

- Treated wool and cotton
  - For changing workplace temperatures
- Leather
  - Guards against cuts and bruises when handling heavy, sharp, or rough materials.
- Rubber, rubberized fabrics, neoprene, and plastics
  - Protects against certain acids and other chemicals.

## Pictograms

Pictograms may be used to sensitise workers on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

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Wear gloves



Wear gumboots



Wear overalls



Wear eye shield



Keep locked away  
from children



Wash after use



Dangerous to animals



Do not contaminate  
water system

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# The Importance of Health and Safety (H&S) in Construction

**Respirators** prevent the wearer from inhaling hazards.



**A dust-mask respirator**

**A half-face cartridge respirator**



**A self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA)**



**Picture a: Face Shield**



**Picture b: Safety boots**

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**Picture c:** Gloves



**Picture d:** Safety helmet with visor



**Picture e:** Ear muffs and visor on a safety helmet



**Picture f:** Coveralls



**THE END**