

The two Hispanic workers who drowned might have been saved, but their co-workers were afraid of talking with “officials”...

How to Effectively Communicate Safety to the Hispanic/Latino Workforce

- Canoe capsized in an eight- to 15-foot deep golf course pond.
- Grounds crew member mowing grass nearby jumped into the water to help his co-worker, but both disappeared under the water.
- The grounds crew member knew how to use a two-way radio, but had left it on shore.
- EMS rescuers arrived a short time later, but co-workers sent them to the wrong side of the pond.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

- Investigators say the Hispanic/Latino grounds crew members were likely afraid of talking with uniformed officers and rescue personnel.
- They suggested that orientation for workers from other countries who may have fears about “officials” include an explanation of their purpose in the community and how they help protect and aid persons in need.
- The two Hispanic laborers, ages 22 and 45, died of asphyxia due to drowning.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

In another incident in California, 19-year-old Gerardo Rodriguez had decided that landscaping work wasn't "daring" enough for him...

This young native of Mexico was a risk-taker, and he wanted to climb trees.

One day, he was scaling a 50-foot palm tree yanking dead fronds. But he pulled on the wrong frond and the entire weave came loose.

Gerardo was pinned to the safety belt that held him to the tree. He died of asphyxiation.

Gerardo's friends said he liked climbing trees to show how "brave" he was...

HOW EFFECTIVELY DO YOU COMMUNICATE SAFETY TO YOUR HISPANIC/LATINO WORKERS?

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- Your workers may know little or no English.
- Do they know enough just to get by? Or can they effectively communicate in English in an emergency situation?
- Crew members may speak different dialects of Spanish. Their crew leader may speak still a different dialect – even if he or she originates from the same country.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- Your workers may not have had much formal schooling in their native countries. Comprehension of someone with a third grade or fifth grade education will greatly differ from that of a college graduate.
- Your workers may not be able to read or write in English.
- They may not be able to read or write in SPANISH.

LITERACY LEVEL BARRIERS

- Fear of institutions/officials/persons in “authority” – government, doctors, law enforcement, anyone in uniform.
- Risk-taking (especially among young males in countries such as Mexico). Risk-taking is considered the NORM in many cultures.
- Strong desire to “please the boss.”
- Hesitancy to ask questions. May instead just shake their heads “yes” when asked if they understand.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

- Lack of direct eye contact (particularly with older persons or persons “in authority” such as a supervisor conducting safety training). Direct eye contact is considered disrespectful.
- Little or no previous exposure to safety training or safety rules.
- No previous exposure to skid-steer loaders, Z-mowers, forklifts or other potentially hazardous equipment used here.

MORE CULTURAL BARRIERS

**WHAT DOES OSHA
HAVE TO SAY?**

“An employer must instruct employees using both a language and vocabulary that employees can understand.”

If the employee's vocabulary is limited, the training must account for that limitation.

- An average of 197 landscape services workers died from on-the-job injuries each year between 2003 and 2006. Landscape services workers perform such jobs as landscape installation, maintenance, lawn care, tree care and snow removal.
- Fatality rate for this industry is similar to that of agriculture and mining.
- Although landscape services workers make up less than 1 percent of the total U.S. workforce, they experience 3.5 percent of the fatalities.
- **SOURCE:** NIOSH's "Fatal Injuries Among Landscape Services Workers"

HIGH FATALITY RATE

- In 2006, more than 44 percent of landscape services workers were Hispanic/Latino – compared with 16 percent of the total U.S. workforce. And that number continues to grow.
- Among the ways these workers are dying on the job: motor vehicle incidents, falls from trees and other heights, being crushed by equipment and machinery, drownings, heat stress, electrocutions, runovers (by mowers and other equipment), being struck by falling tree limbs and other objects... the list goes on and on.

HISPANIC WORKERS

- Learn about your workers' CULTURES – and make use of important cultural issues in conjunction with your safety training.
- Example: FAMILY is an important value within Hispanic/Latino cultures.
- When training your Hispanic workers, instead of saying: “If you don't use fall protection, you could fall out of that tree and die” say: “If you fall out of that tree and break your back, who will provide for your family in the future?”

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Instead of saying: “Keep your hands and feet away from those rapidly rotating mower blades – and make sure all guards and shields are in place” say: “Stay away from those rotating blades. We want you to go home to your family with all 10 toes and all 10 fingers intact.”
- Instead of saying: “Wear your safety glasses so you don’t lose your eyesight” say: “Wear your safety glasses. If you lose your eyesight, you won’t be able to see your children grow up.”

MORE USE OF “FAMILY”

- Learn what “body language” is important within your workers’ cultures. For example, is a strong handshake acceptable? A hug? What about staring at a worker (especially one who is older than you are)?
- Always do “hands-on” training. Don’t just demonstrate how to operate a piece of equipment. Have workers demonstrate it for you before you send them to the job site.
- Make use of “props” in your safety training – dented safety glasses, cut chain saw chaps, etc.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Don't rely on words alone to convey your safety messages – even if you are training in Spanish. Look for PHOTOS... illustrations... other GRAPHIC examples to get your messages across.
- Fairly and consistently discipline all of your workers for violations of safety rules. But learn about the importance of not disciplining your Hispanic/Latino crew members in front of others in the crew. If you do, you may lose your entire crew.
- Celebrate Cinco de Mayo and other holidays.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Appoint safety “mentors” for new employees. Have the mentor wear a cap that states on the front: “Hablo Español.”
- Work side by side with your native Spanish-speaking employees so you can learn some Spanish while they learn some English.
- Have a bilingual supervisor accompany injured Spanish-speaking workers to the doctor – to translate, to tell the doctor about your company’s return-to-work program, and to help alleviate the worker’s fears.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

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- Allow workers who may not be able to write to sign off on safety sessions by putting an “x” next to their printed name. Have a witness sign his or her name next to the worker’s “x.”
- Include a line in your safety session sign-off sheets (in both Spanish and English) that states: “This information was explained to me in a language and a manner I understand.”
- Show interest in your workers’ families. Address them by their first names when you walk by and ask them how their families are doing.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Consider holding English-speaking classes on-site – or paying for workers to attend them elsewhere in your community. Contact community organizations that serve Spanish-speaking workers for assistance.
- Understand the importance of praise and recognition. Take digital photos of workers doing their jobs safely, then post them on your company bulletin board with a note that says: “Congratulations, Juan (or the worker’s name), for being SAFE.” (NOTE: Do this for ALL of your workers.)

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Be DIRECT in your training and other safety messages. Don't use long or complex words that will be difficult to understand.
- Work hard to promote qualified Hispanic/Latino employees into supervisory positions so they can serve as role models for others. However, be aware of the potential cultural barriers that exist (such as not wanting to be perceived as "the boss").
- Treat your workers (all workers) as if they were members of your own family.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS

- Start with your insurance company or insurance agent. Ask about safety checklists, periodic job site safety audits, persons to help translate into Spanish, video lending libraries, free Web-based resources.
- Look to your trade associations – ANLA, PLANET, your state trade associations. Find out what Spanish-language resources are available. Ask about persons who understand both Hispanic/Latino cultures and safety.

RESOURCES

- Talk to others in your industry with good safety records. Find out what tools they have used to effectively reach their Hispanic/Latino employees. (NOTE: PLANET's STARS Safe Company Program is one good resource for this.)
- Make use of free, credible Web-based English-Spanish safety resources. (See handouts at this session.) Be extremely careful of unfamiliar Web-based sources, especially if you do not know Spanish.

MORE RESOURCES

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