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## Prevention, safety become integral to operations

By SHEILA LIVADAS - 7/31/2015

Amid evolving client expectations and increasingly complex regulations, local demand for construction-safety training and services remains strong. The topic itself has shifted in recent years from an obligation to an integral part of operations.

A decade ago, a worksite injury would trigger questions such as “Who messed up?” says Richard Gianforti Jr., owner of Rochester-based Flower City Glass.

Construction professionals have become more focused on prevention and less apt to point fingers.

“And it’s not just one person’s responsibility,” Gianforti says.

Rochester-area contractors have deepened their bench of safety experts in different ways. Some have added in-house positions, while others rely on consultants.

LeFrois Builders LLC of Henrietta has turned to Rochester-based Sexton Services Inc. for safety inspections of the company’s jobsites. The ongoing renovation of the 17-floor Tower280—formerly Midtown Tower—gets inspected every workday, says John LeFrois, vice president at LeFrois Builders, the project’s construction manager.

The firm also does daily “toolbox” talks to ensure workers understand the hazards, risks and procedures associated with the tasks at hand. Topics covered during the brief sessions, known as tailgate or tailboard trainings in builder parlance, range from vehicle safety in wet conditions to noise protection.

“And all their real purpose is a reminder for everybody to ... keep a safety-conscious attitude,” LeFrois says.

He adds: “In general, there’s just more awareness about safety out in the workplace.”

Six months ago, Flower City Glass began working with Rochester-based Rogers Enterprises Construction Safety & Quality Consulting to take a more proactive approach to injury prevention.

“When I started (in the industry), it was kind of customary for a company our size, which is a ... small-to-midsize specialty contractor, to have somebody on their management team also handle the safety role,” says Gianforti, whose relatives launched the company in 1924. “And I did that coming out of college, where I actually ... helped rewrite our safety program and got really into safety.

“But the requirements changed so much over the years that you really need people that are specialized and understand how the regulations are written, how ... you have to comply with them,” adds Gianforti, whose company also does toolbox talks.

Specializing in commercial, residential and auto glass, Flower City Glass has 67 full-time equivalents. Recent projects at the firm have included installing floor-to-ceiling windows at Hattie’s, the recently opened rooftop lounge and event space at the Strathallan Hotel.

Beyond requiring that workers wear safety glasses, safety gloves and high-visibility vests, some clients now expect contractors to produce site-specific safety plans detailing the precautions taken for every task, LeFrois says.

“Sometimes there (are) some requirements that employees don’t like because ... it’s one more burden on them trying to get the job done,” adds LeFrois, whose company employs 80. “But at the end of the day, it’s all about keeping them safe.”

Certain clients also require contractors to disclose on bid forms their experience modification rate, a comparison between the number and cost of workers’ compensation claims made by a firm’s employees with those of industry

peers of the same size.

"I don't know how much weight that has in the award process, but the fact that they're putting it on their bid form means it has some relevance and importance," Gianforti says. "And we believe that it's good for us because we work really hard at safety."

Insurance carriers also use experience mod to determine premium prices, while the Occupational Safety and Health Administration relies on the rate information as a tool for evaluating safety performance and helping businesses improve safety standards.

Brisk demand has kept local organizations that specialize in safety training hopping. Rochester Institute of Technology's OSHA Education Center, for example, trained 721 students last year, marking an 8 percent increase over 2013.

"I attribute that to repeat business," says Kitren VanStrander, director of outreach education and training at RIT.

New courses at the education center range from best practices in crane and derrick operation to occupational safety and health standards for the maritime industry.

"We also offer a new certificate program in public-sector safety and health fundamentals," VanStrander says. "This certificate is available for construction or general industry and is awarded after successful completion of a minimum of seven courses and a minimum of 68 contact hours."

Like RIT, Monroe Community College's Corporate College offers OSHA construction-safety courses, but typically at employers' request, says Rosanna Yule, assistant director of marketing and community relations at MCC. The college determines the cost to employers on a contract basis.

Rising interest in safety training comes at a time when the Rochester area has seen fatalities at construction sites.

During the completion of the University of Rochester Medical Center's Golisano Children's Hospital last month, a local plumbing contractor at Davis-Ulmer Sprinkler Co. was struck by a metal pipe fitting and died the following day. That same week, a construction worker at The Pike Co. Inc. drowned in the Genesee River after the small workboat he was in under the Inner Loop bridge flipped, and his safety tether got caught on an abutment, trapping him underwater.

When LeFrois Builders schedules OSHA trainings at its warehouse, the company often invites its subcontractors and suppliers to ensure that "everybody on the whole project is working in a safe manner," LeFrois says.

He adds: "The biggest thing is that customers are demanding it. I mean, some projects we wouldn't be able to get without ... showing that we're going to go through all the proper safety protocol."

*Sheila Livadas is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*

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