

BUREAU OF WORKER'S COMPENSATION SAFETY ROUNDTABLE

Roundtable

A small business that's big on safety

The Roundtable section features BWC customers and partners sharing their respective views on issues and events regarding BWC and Ohio's workers' compensation system. As we continue to share best practices among small businesses, this article features the management team at Quality Masonry Co. Inc. (QMC) in Marion discussing its masonry restoration company's award-winning workplace safety strategies, and how other small businesses can achieve the same successes.

QMC, a 30-employee contractor founded in 1968, received the 2004 Governor's Excellence in Workers' Compensation Award in recognition of its outstanding safety program (See page 20 for information on the award program and how to nominate an employer for this honor in 2005).

In the fall 2004 issue, we introduced you to BWC's Small Business Advocate Sherri Simpson, and how she assists small businesses with their workers' compensation and safety program needs. In the winter 2005 issue, we featured a story on roundtable discussion in which small business professionals discussed workplace safety and cost-saving strategies.



Quality Masonry's management team discusses the importance of ongoing employee training.



William Bowers, Quality Masonry's secretary-treasurer, explains the company's safety program components.

Why safety matters

"All employees should have the expectation they can go home at the end of the day the same way they came," said William Bowers, QMC's secretary-treasurer. "It doesn't always happen, but you can do things to try to facilitate that."

The company's emphasis on safety is integrated into every job duty of every employee. "We don't make time for safety," said Bret Bowers, QMC's operations manager. "It's part of our every day duties. It's a state of mind; it's always there. You make safety a part of daily life."

Not surprisingly, the company's vision statement reflects the focus on safety: "Safety is never an accident — it is always the result of good intentions, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives." As a result, QMC's accident record is minimal. In 2001, the company had five claims with zero lost-time days, and in 2003, it had just one claim with zero lost-time days.

Safety conditions and challenges

QMC's employees face a variety of unique safety challenges, risks and conditions every day. Their knowledge and commitment to safety in the techniques of building renovation, including pressure and chemical cleaning, waterproofing, painting, caulking and steeple work, are the tools that keep workplace injuries at a minimum.

"As we look at a project and go out to bid it, we obviously look at the cost to do the work and material to build it, but we also look at special safety requirements," William explained. In many cases, employees receive specialized training before starting a new job. For example, when QMC worked on a grain silos project earlier this year, employees completed the client's safety program before starting the job.

"Not only do we have to look at what we're doing, but we also have to look at the environment around it — and that starts right at the bidding phase," William said. "We work with a lot of chemicals and dust, and you have to be aware of how they react with the environment and your body, and take the protective safety measures to keep yourself safe. Our employees have a right to know what types of potential safety risks they are involved with."

Training is engrained from day one

The focus on safety begins on day one with each and every employee. QMC's time and investment spent on safety is an essential business element. "You have to find the time for safety," William said. "My dad used to say that when you trade safety for profit, you risk both."

Safety orientation begins on employees' first day. They watch 11 videos over a three-hour period on safety topics, including scaffolding, ladders, electricity and driving.

"We ensure they understand, coming through the door, what is expected," said Justin Bowers, a QMC project administrator. One video employees view during safety meetings is called "Right to Know," which explains the health risks of working with chemicals, such as potassium hydroxide.

"We also have a mentoring program, where new employees are paired with a more experienced employee," Justin explained. "Our foremen and most of our staff have been with us for quite some time and know our safety program well. Yet, we always emphasize to everyone that you always have to be aware of safety."

Safety meetings — videos and tests

Employee safety meetings are held once a month, and the entire staff discusses any accidents, near-misses and any unusual projects coming up in terms of safety. Then, a safety video on a specific safety topic is shown. QMC borrows the videos from BWC's library. Justin selects the videos, and prepares a true-false test that employees complete while watching the tape.

"The written tests are effective because they provide the feedback that you want; you know they are paying attention," Justin noted. The tests consist of common sense questions, but those in which you would have to watch the video to understand or already know the information, Bret added.

First, second and third place prizes are awarded each month for the best test scores from the month before, and year-end bonuses are an extra incentive. "Sometimes a test question asks what the topic was for the previous month, and it jogs their memory and keeps the information fresh," Bret explained.

Employees want to take the test because it's a competition for them. "It was never meant to be like that, but it turned into a competition for each one of them of who can get the best score, said Bret. "But at the same time, and they don't even know it, they're learning and it keeps it in their minds; it's a refresher course for most of them. The competition is a motivating factor."

Since the tests are true-false, employees know the correct answer when they get the graded tests back, which are included with their paychecks along with a written reminder of the date and time of the next safety meeting. "The training is effective because every employee is at every meeting, and they all receive the same, complete information," said Jeff Johnson, a QMC project administrator. "It is so important that we make sure everyone is there in that classroom setting." ♦



Justin Bowers, a Quality Masonry project administrator, explains the company's mentoring program and its safety value.

First-hand advice for other small businesses

Quality Masonry Co. Inc.'s (QMC's) management team shared their advice for other small businesses struggling to develop an effective safety program.

- Take advantage of BWC's safety resources and cost-saving programs.
- Be involved in finding out answers to questions, recognizing a challenging situation and attempting to resolve it.
- Keep up to date on workers' compensation laws and activities.
- Participate in your local safety council for networking opportunities. BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene sponsors 60 safety councils statewide.
- Develop a safety training and orientation program, along with written communication on safe work practices.
- QMC provides these for all employees, as well as site-specific safety orders and on-site safety inspectors, not only before a project begins but also at regular intervals until a project's completion.

For more information on workers' compensation programs and services, log on to ohiobwc.com.

In the spring of 2005 Quality Masonry Co. was contacted by the State of Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation representative concerning the quality of our safety programs & record. While discussing our thoughts & activities, QMC was asked if we could present a Safety Roundtable article for their quarterly magazine. This Safety Roundtable occurred with the QMC safety staff and the BWC writer and photographer. This article was published in the Spring 2005 Quarterly Magazine, being sent to over 280,000 Ohio employers.