SAFETY FIRST

Your Workplace’s SAFETY CULTURE Begins With YOU!

Local 478
The Most Valuable Thing on Every Job Site is Human Life:
Why it's Important for Workers to Speak-up before Tragedy Hits the Job Site

The unity that bonds us during times of prosperity and the collective resilience that lifts us during the challenging times are dim in comparison to the concern and compassion and empathy that we share with one another when tragedy strikes any member of the Local 478 family.

The loss of any of our Local brothers or sisters is heart wrenching, but somehow the shock and disbelief are intensified when a tragedy happens on a job site. Unlike an illness or a non-work accident, injury and death on job sites are so much harder to process both logically and emotionally. Too often, workers and their families have difficulty coming to terms with the loss of life because there are rarely absolute or timely answers to the question, “How did this happen”? One need only look back to April 23, 1987, when a concrete floor at L’Ambiance Plaza, a 16-story apartment complex in the middle of construction, collapsed killing 28 workers under its massive weight. Our own operating engineers worked around the clock with the other trades digging through the rubble and crumbled concrete in a heroic effort looking for survivors and recovering bodies. And, yet still today, 30 years later, many of the parents and children and wives of the men killed at L’Ambiance have never understood exactly what went wrong. Since the L’Ambiance tragedy, our Local has lost other members to worksite accidents some of which had complete analysis and specific conclusions about what happened, others that will forever remain unresolved.

As you read through this “Special Safety Edition” of the Local 478 quarterly newsletter, it is imperative that you fully understand that YOUR LIFE AND WELL BEING ON THE JOB SITE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO THIS LOCAL. I know you hear me preach about politics and prevailing wage and project labor agreements; but, have no doubt, my number one priority is the personal safety of every one of our operating engineers whether you are in the field, in a shop or quarry or wherever. You returning home safely from work each day is the number one goal of this business manager, the business agents, the referral manager and every individual who works for Local 478.

Every year, the construction industry ranks in the top three on the most hazardous industries list. As manufacturing decreases, construction injuries and deaths have pushed our industry to the top of the list for several years. The hazards of working around fast moving equipment, heavy materials and in tight spaces are only going to continue to increase as employers must meet higher production goals to remain competitive and as our industry expands to more trenching and sub-terrain work. It would seem like having more experience in a job would automatically make one safer; but sometimes, just like when we drive our car to our own home, we are so habitual (almost robotic) in our movement and our work, that we can do things without really being aware of our surroundings. Sometimes, we can get so caught up in the work and so in the swing of things that we fail to notice changes, like a truck that pulled in behind us or a person who moved into a spot that was vacant just moments before. Furthermore, as the old saying “time is money” rings louder for both the employer and the workers, the desire to get in, get going and get it done as quickly as possible overpowers us, and then we disregard the importance of taking our time and making sure that everything and everyone is safe before we proceed to work.

For the past 30 years, Local 478 has worked in conjunction with our contractors, our training school, our members, and outside entities like OSHA and the DOT to create a culture of safety in Connecticut’s heavy construction industry. We have come to accept that often, operating engineers have the sole ability to raise the standard of safety higher because when YOU can shut down the heavy equipment YOU can usually shut down the job. Every operating engineer who sees or even thinks they see an accident waiting to happen has to stop until they are absolutely sure that everything is safe. If you find yourself in the situation where your working conditions are unsafe, first you should inform the employer and then you should call the hall and, we will promptly follow up with a visit to the site. If you believe the dangerous situation is urgent, you should stop the process immediately and inform the company and then call the Local. Our signatory contractors would rather have a job shut down for a couple of hours to resolve a safety issue than have the job shut down for weeks after an accident while OSHA investigates. In the end, just remember that disrupting the work flow is a short inconvenience that will pass; but, the guilt and post-traumatic stress that accompany the realization that you could have prevented someone from being injured or killed on the job site is a feeling that will never leave you. Always Put Safety First.
Keeping Safety First
Don Shubert, President of the Connecticut Construction Industries Association

Everyone’s combined efforts are central to a successful safety program. There is more to success than just going through the paces.

To start a safety program, construction companies create an array of external stimulus affecting job-site safety. These initiatives include creating safer workplaces and machinery; implementing the most current rules and procedures; making sure workers are using personal protective equipment; hiring talented supervisors to evaluate safety programs and constantly implement the latest strategies; placing requirements on subcontractors; and providing as much training as possible.

All of this external direction has a cumulative positive effect on safety in the workplace. It raises awareness, teaches the latest techniques and rules, and it provides incentive to work safely. It also improves knowledge, performance, and motivation. However, until safety becomes personal, and employees make internal decisions to choose to be safe, all of this external stimulus within a given company has a limited effect.

A more sustainable and richer safety program for all comes from a different source, the actual employee. It is generated from deep inside every employee, whether they are in corporate management, are supervisors, or tradespeople. A company safety program reaches its highest level when everyone acknowledges and assesses his or her own safety and the safety of those around them. This occurs when safety becomes the top priority in everyone’s thoughts, beliefs and values. It is where people focus their attention on what is most relevant, and the most relevant thing is safety.

Safety professionals and supervisors are not able to drill this concept into people, or discipline them into complying to any significant extent. It may work for a task or a limited period of time, but it doesn’t last. People have to choose to practice and exercise safety. It is up to the employee’s sense of personal wellbeing to reach the highest level of safety at work.

Successful construction companies are acutely aware of this dynamic and they strive to develop personal behavioral change. They go beyond using positive reinforcement and punishment to influence behaviors. They move safety past the plateau that occurs when people get accustomed to the systems, signals, signs, and regulations.

Personal awareness is the key. Once employees reach the point where safety is truly first on everyone’s mind, the rest will fall into place. Obviously, there is no instant, automatic way to accomplish this. It takes time, and consistent practice and messaging. Companies must deploy a full set of external stimuli to forge a comprehensive safety program. To make it work, employees have to focus on fundamentally changing their own personal behaviors.

Notice of Asbestos Exposure at the Moses Wheeler Bridge

If you worked on the Moses Wheeler Bridge with O&G, the Walsh/PCL Joint Venture or any subcontractors on the Stratford side of the bridge, you may have potentially been exposed to asbestos. In November, 2016, we were made aware that CTDOT and CT Department of Health found asbestos present in ground borings on the Stratford side of the bridge. Since there bid specs did not include information about asbestos, there was no monitoring and, therefore, we have no way to determine what your potential exposure may have been. The locations that tested positive for asbestos were on the Walmart/Home Depot side of Rt 95 in Stratford. Asbestos generally takes between 20 to 30 years after exposure before there are any symptoms of an asbestos related disease. Members who worked in the industry between 1950 and 1980 were most likely exposed on numerous job sites; therefore, there is nothing to do at this time. If you are diagnosed with an asbestos related disease in the future, you can file a Worker’s Comp claim at that time naming all jobsite exposures.
Construction Safety- Along Time Ago

In 1956, the highway coming to Connecticut was the biggest piece of work ever; and, I was fortunate to work with the operating engineers. Then, safety was never discussed. You went to the job, got the job done and went home. There weren't cabs on the equipment. There weren't safety guards on anything. Machines weren't hydraulic, only cable. No one thought about goggles, hard hats, seat belts - they just didn't exist. With dust conditions, you rode the machine like a cowboy with a handkerchief over your face to breathe or pulled your t-shirt around your face and dug the grit out of your eyes at the end of the day.

There were no concerns about what was broken on a machine, flopping around; you just went to work and that's what you did. I'm going to go as simple as if there's no drinking water all day on a job, that's a safety issue to me or no guard that's going to keep you from getting your head cut off or losing a hand. There were injuries on a weekly basis. People went home without fingers and crushed feet. Gradually, through the unions' efforts and when the unions started to get stronger because of population and the work demand, unions were the only organization that could supply qualified trained people so they became a very important entity when it came to worker safety.

In the beginning, management didn't show much interest or any tendency to care. They were sitting in their office with heat control while we were out there dying. The biggest battle was that in the field. I couldn't imagine the inside fights that got us workers where we are today. Negotiating was not a business form back in the 1950's. Instead, whatever management said was it. The working relationship hadn't developed for both parties. But, eventually, management decided there were too many people getting hurt and too many guys losing income and, as a result, safety slowly became one of managements' priorities.

In the 1960's, the union also began health and welfare programs for when guys got hurt. I remember, it was brought up to the membership at a meeting and, I'll openly admit that the first night it was introduced, I voted against it. I'll never forget the shot that knocked me right off the chair. It was my father, and he told me I would rue the day that I thought like that, and just a few years later, I under- stood what he meant, when I had my own family and the medical expenses that came along with it and the worry of not having a job because I might break ribs or a wrist - which I accomplished running a scraper but went to work anyways.

That's what you did in those days. You wrapped your hand up yourself to stop the bleeding. I saw guys stuff their cuts with dirt because no first aid kits were available. There was zero safety available. It was so draining because no one had any clue what to do.

It was arduous. Contractors didn't want the expense and workmen's comp wasn't a thing, so there was nothing for the worker to fall back on. For a long time there was no insurance that covered you, so you were in deep trouble if you got injured. Eventually through legislation and the continuous efforts of the unions and all the industries, a movement started that kind of became a package deal. Still, guys would discuss accidents at coffee break because it was so common. As time progressed and we got into the 1960s, machines started to come out with a cab of sorts, which would result in you getting crushed if it tipped because it wasn't reinforced, but it kept you out of the weather. Contractors loved it, sure they'll pay a little extra for a cab because the job wouldn't be shut down due to the weather, and you wouldn't freeze. A lot of different issues entered into very simple changes. First, a guard for your legs where everyone was getting hit by the levers and, then, manufacturers made up configurations and came up with ergonomics - big time to design. They started to take the operator into consideration because safety would save the project. The contractors got incentives from the insurance companies if they were safe. Machines became more efficient. Something as simple as having a water wagon on the job was life changing.

Safety helped develop the working relationship between labor and management because it was good for both. They would sit at the table and as long as management saw some benefit to it, it was a go. The unions were pushing for us and since the contractors were benefitting, the pushing for safety was on.

In 1971, OSHA came into effect and it was horrendous. There was no correlation between OSHA and contractors because OSHA was just developing. Contractors didn't want to have to pay $54 for a safety belt that someone would probably abuse.
The contractors always had a big black cloud called “costs”. It didn’t cost me anything as an employee, but for the employer it was costly, especially for a business that has to show profit every day. I couldn’t imagine telling them “you have to spend money to make money” but it was achieved, and rather quickly in my opinion. Contractors started to get on board when they realized production was enhanced greatly when you didn’t have the loss of manpower. Workman’s comp came into play, and it was very expensive for the contractor. We all began wearing hardhats that weren’t comfortable and became a distraction, falling down over our eyes, and that wouldn’t protect you much if something was to fall. Finally, we all got on board and said we needed something more practical for a hard hat.

Education began playing a big role in safety. Before, you picked up your bucket, your hard hat, and someone was going to tell you what to do. Today, it’s different. For example if you take your crane test, at least 30 percent will be about safety; even items that you don’t think are safely related usually are. Safety is the foundation of that machine. A crane boom in itself is a lethal weapon. Back then you could put a load on a crane and you might feel it tip a little but you would hang on and hopefully be just fine. Today if that computer is out of service or you choose to override it, that boom just might blow up. Safety!

When it came to safety over the past 60 years, you didn’t have to be union to benefit from the safety push made by unions and their contractors. But, now everybody has to provide the same safety conditions but not because of OSHA. When safety is practiced on a union job, the non-union contractors around you have to do it too. This helps to level the playing field a little when it comes to bidding since now even non-union contractors have to factor the cost of safety into their bids.

I’m strictly an advocate of these companies that come with their own safety program. I think you have to look long and hard to find a company whose safety program doesn’t surpass OSHA standards. If safety is promoted by the men on the job and the contractors are the enforcement, then everybody is better off. Still today, even with signs on the machines and alarms, sometimes someone just makes a mistake. Big discussions must be had at all the safety meetings.

Sometimes you have to just say, “No”! There have been times when I have said that the machine can’t do it, and people above me have said, “That isn’t what the manual says.” When I know I’m over on my scale because I can feel it, and I’ve look at the variables, the weather, expansion and contraction, the angle of the approach and the mathematical equation (keeping an extra 10 percent over the 20 percent they give me in my pocket just to be safe) is off, I wouldn’t make the pick. When I told the employer that I wouldn’t do it, I always knew that I had made the right and safe decision.

**Construction Safety- A Moment in Time**

All my life I wanted to work on a powerhouse and, I finally got the chance when I was 62 years old. On Wednesday, February 2, 2000, I got up as I normally did, my 5 o’clock wake up and read the sports. Went in to kiss my wife goodbye because that was our ritual, no matter what was going on in life, we gave a big kiss and a hug goodbye because I didn’t want to go to work ever thinking that something was wrong. I’m thinking about my job on the way to work, where I was going to set up the crane.

When I got to the Milford Power Plant, I moved my crane to cover the spot that another crane operator normally worked because he had to go to a funeral. I made the picks, I set my last tube, and I went to coffee break with the ironworkers around 9:15 AM. I always talked to them on break to see what their next move was. I drank my cup of coffee and ran back to the machine. I knew I had two picks to my right; one was a 25 ton and one was a 15, so I looked at the computer to make sure I could make both picks. I did it on the computer and I also did it mathematically with paper and pencil. Then I heard THUMP.

Holy mackerel, I had no idea what was happening. All the rust and dirt must have filled my eyes; I was bleeding out of my eyes. I couldn’t see. I had no clue what happened, so I made my eyes water. And finally, I was able to open one eye a little bit. Holy crip I’m looking at steel, everything hurts and I can’t move. I had a piece of steel around my neck and one across my chest and I wasn’t breathing too good.
And, that was my biggest concern, my breathing.

I always carry a pocketknife with me, so I was able to get that, and cut some of my bib overalls, so that I had a little more room to breathe. I laid there and thought about what went wrong. I saw my radio, it was crushed. I forgot I had my backup radio. I kept...
It wasn’t effective. I was getting weak.

I said, “Just send everyone home, go have a shower, kiss the wife and have a cold one on me, I love you all. I’m done, I’m done here, and it’s been a great trip. Tell everyone I said goodbye, tell my wife I love her.” I asked if they talked to my wife, and they said, “No they couldn’t reach her.” That was probably a good thing. The entire crew stayed, determined that they were going to get me out. I asked for some morphine, but they couldn’t give it to me because of the situation with my blood circulation. The oiler was a woman who always had cough drops. I told her I didn’t care how many cough drops she had to drop through that hole, I would get one of them! She dropped about four or five and I got one, unwrapped it, and popped it in my mouth. It was heaven, it soothed all that crap in there, because between my throat and my need to go pee more than you can believe, the pain was unimaginable.

My son Michael was talking to me from below and told me that my left foot was a mess so he was going to have to hurt me. So I said, “Go ahead.” After he and the firemen cut some of the wreckage off, they were able to free my leg a little bit. Eventually, the top crew was able to get blades to cut in front of me. They also tried to move one of the outriggers, which created a strangle hold on me. I really got mad at this point because by now my legs were the problem. The ironworkers started cutting everything. As I was pushing the pieces away, I cut my hand and really started bleeding everywhere.

Throughout those hours, there was a great doctor who asked, “Do you think you can amputate your right leg if I gave you the tourniquet and the instruments?” I told him that I could get to about 2/3 of my leg and then I’d have to cut through everything and that I would probably end up cutting some important stuff. I said I can’t do it so just send me a few jacks. I used the jacks to lift some of the steel off my legs when I heard an ironworker say, “I got you Bobby.” He grabbed me by my overall straps; but, since I cut them before, they just slipped. Eventually, he got a good grip under
my arm pits and started to pull me up a bit, but my leg was still caught.

That day, I had worn a pair of bright green Totes because it was muddy and crummy. I put them on once and I loved them. They were great boots! A piece of steel had caught my twisted leg, attached to my twisted foot, inside my Tote boots and, it wouldn't let go. Through the hole in the floor Michael was able to untangle my legs from below while they were pulling me up. In that moment, I said, "You gotta get me out quick, because if I don't pee, it's going to look bad in my obit."

At the hospital, I lay in the room while the doctors were seeing if I had brain damage or if hypothermia had set in. I kept feeling my right leg fall off the table and asked the nurses if they could just tie it up. Instead, they gave me a paper to sign so they could amputate both my legs. My doctor, who was an ex-army surgeon who had served in Vietnam and did a “million amputations” in the field, surprised me when he didn’t take both legs. When I woke up five or six days after the surgery, I asked my daughter why the hell did they leave my leg and, she told me they were able to save one. My surviving foot required several surgeries, but today I still think my survival was miraculous.

Construction Safety- And Time Moves On
If you got down to each individual story from that fateful day in February and realize that there was a time when the guys came and said bye to me in the wreckage, you would better understand how a construction accident impacts everyone on the site. Eventually, I got out of the hospital, went to rehab, got a prosthetic (which was possible because the surgeon left enough leg), faced every challenge head on, and even went back to work. Since then, I’ve told a lot of guys on jobs, “My day could have been your day that day, it could be anything, getting in an accident, falling down the stairs, or just getting to the damn car. Safety! As far as safety goes, it’s important to have the right attitude about safety, and, as a young man, I didn’t always have it. It’s was a nuisance. I hated the regulations. I never wore a seat belt until after my job was threatened, then I wore my seat belt and never looked back. Life is all I got, and I know I’m lucky, especially when I think about the two guys who lost their lives at the power plant. I think about their wives and their young kids. To this day, I still stay in touch with them because of our shared experience and, because I want to know that they are all taken care of.

Some people have asked me if the accident gave me posttraumatic stress (PTS) and I tell them that I already had that from my years in Korea. The coping mechanism that I developed for myself was to appreciate making it out alive (both from war and the power plant accident) and to give back. Today, I work with veterans, especially those who are amputees. A lot of the young ones will complain and say their life is over, and I tell them it’s not over, you have a whole life ahead of you. If you have a good attitude and show a glimmer of hope, life will be good. And, of course, it helps to be safe in life.
The Three Most Important Things in Construction: Safety, Safety, Safety

Fact: Between 2002 and 2012, 19.5% of all workplace deaths were in the construction industry.

Fact: Construction accidents account for over 15% of ALL private industry accidents.

Fact: One in ten construction workers are injured every year, and over the course of a 45-year career, a construction worker has a 1 in 200 chance of dying.

There is an old saying that “death doesn’t impact the dead.” At first read, one might not think much about this quote; however, its meaning is really much deeper when you put it in the context of those people who have survived a near death experience or those who have lost a loved one to an untimely death. Construction accidents, whether or not they involve a fatality or an injury, are devastating to our trade, our industry and ultimately our members. Construction accidents cost more than lost wages for the workers who are pushed off the site during the investigation. They cost more than the fines or lost productivity for which the employer may have to pay. They cost more then what the insurance companies or worker’s comp may have to dole out. Construction accidents can potentially cost all of us our faith in our chosen profession or even worse our life or the life of one of our fellow workers.

The first step in re-enforcing Connecticut’s construction industry safety culture is changing our view about the role that we each play in keeping the work site safe. We must each accept that we have a certain amount of control on the work site as well as the ability to make calls to the hall, to the agents or to OSHA when we feel the job site is not safe. Our Local is committed to ensuring that every 478 operating engineer works in an environment that is as free of dangers as possible. We know that construction is a dangerous industry, but if a member reports that there are issues with the equipment (chemical or personnel), the site (chemical, hazmat or open trenching, etc.) or with other workers, we will investigate immediately and follow up promptly.

But, you must do your part too. After 9-11, the words “if you see something, say something” became the phrase that reminded each of us that we have a collective responsibility to watch out for all of us. Sometimes, you might be on a job site and something that seems “insignificant” might catch your attention and make you hesitate or look back a few times. Don’t just brush it off because things that seem so slight are often the cause of accidents.

Every day, whether or not you have an employer led toolbox talk, you should take the extra steps to perform your own safety inventory. Take your time; become fully aware of your surroundings; and, speak up when you don’t feel safe because your life and the lives of your brothers and sisters in the trades could depend on it. Bob Kunz from Dimeo Construction Company always emphasizes the need for his employees to “be responsible for your personal space” which includes the immediate area where you are working as well as the outer area. This also touches on personal space away from your immediate jobsite since your family, friends, coworkers and employer will also be affected if you are involved in a construction accident.

Accidents are unfortunately a part of the construction industry and, sadly, it seems as though the only time laws get changed or regulations and rules are followed is after an accident. But laws after the fact don’t do much to assist people who were hurt or injured in a construction accident. In addition to being strong advocates for workplace safety on the site, operating engineers must also become advocates for stronger safety laws especially when a new part of the industry is emerging like the expansion of tunneling that goes with pipeline work. In the beginning, as we see in Bob Fitch’s testimonial, most of us realize that new safety laws are a burden, but eventually, the employer, the union and the workers recognize that laws and regulations are created to protect the worker and the general population that travels in or around the construction site or quarry or shop or plant. Promoting safety is everyone’s responsibility and duty.

In his article, Business Manager Craig Metz writes about the L’Ambiance tragedy and the devastating impact that it had on the trades. As a result of that tragedy, lift slab construction was banned in Connecticut, an OSHA satellite office was established in downtown Bridgeport, and, additional safety rules for workers were put in place. One would think legislative and regulatory changes would lower the number of construction accidents; but, they haven’t. Perhaps one of the greatest reasons for the staggering number of construction accidents is the move from a time when the bulk of heavy equipment would be on the only trade on the site to now “fast track” construction where multiple trades are working on the site even before the foundation is finished. Local 478 member Bob Fitch also spoke about “hyper-track” construction where the goal of getting the project finished at warp speed causes workers to move almost robotically through the construction process without stopping to constantly access their surroundings. We all understand that time is money.
and that in order to make a profit and sustain their businesses, contractors (often driven by project owners and consumers like drivers stuck in road construction traffic) have to complete projects in a timely manner. But the few minutes or hours that you save not correcting a dangerous situation will be wasted if you have an accident and the site gets shut down for days and weeks.

**It Only Takes a Split Second**

Retired OSHA Director Bob Kowalski recently sent me an article titled "If I Didn't Cause the Incident, What did"? The article explains how "when an incident or accident occurs, the first impulse is to look to the operator of the equipment or the individual who was overseeing the job site, alleging that someone or something wasn't done correctly." This fault falls under the general category of an “Affirmative Defense” of employee or supervisory misconduct, which is the most common defense that is used in an OSHA investigation. The article also provides tips on what one should do under these circumstances, such as, having complete working knowledge of the equipment, always using all of the safety equipment, and knowing and understanding the task you are going to perform. Other steps the article emphasizes include inspecting the area where the equipment is going to be placed, and if you observe an unsafe act or condition, stopping the operation and informing the job site foreman or superintendent. The article concludes by reminding the reader to “remember that it only takes a split second for a near miss to become an accident.” So, no matter where you may be working, please be aware, be proactive, and be vigilant.

On March 2, 2017, Construction worker Eric Giguere shared his story with attendees at our 2017 Safety Workshop. As he told his harrowing story, he shared how he was once a guy who didn't put much credence in safety because it wasn't his job and, after all, working construction was about taking chances anyway. For many years, he lived by the all too familiar creed, “It's been done like this forever, nothing will happen.” Then on October 4, 2002, the world literally came crashing down around him in a six foot trench where he was installing water service lines. Without warning, he was completely engulfed and trapped under the collapsed soil that was literally crushing the life out of him. After surviving the accident, Eric made it his purpose to educate other workers so that accidents like his could be avoided. Eric spoke about how he blames himself for his accident and how he faults himself for trying to save a little time and ignoring important safety procedures.

Although he may not have lost his life in the accident, he did lose his recent marriage because the stress of the situation made him a different man “than his wife had married just a few weeks earlier.” He went on to explain how something as simple as having blankets on him when he sleeps can trigger his posttraumatic stress disorder. The accident has forever changed him and his entire family dynamic just because he wanted to save a little time by cutting corners.

Eric also spoke about the turmoil that his co-workers had to go through that day and how he sees now how he put them all in a very bad situation. His co-workers had to make split second decisions like whether to use machinery or shovels to try to dig him out not knowing if they would hit him, or if he was already dead. He mentioned how even after getting him out alive, the other workers dealt with years of anxiety. One of the workers who dug him out of the trench had been a very close friend of his prior to the accident; but, after the accident, they no longer talk unless they happen to bump into each other. He attributes the end of that friendship to the emotional turmoil that resulted from that day. Eric's lessons to all of us:

1. Do not put your co-workers in a rough position just to cut corners.
2. Do not force them to have to make the ultimate decision about your life when deciding how to rescue you.
3. Be proactive and make sure to always inspect a trench or any piece of equipment before entering.

**Trench Collapses, Deadly but Preventable**

Every month, at least two workers are killed in trench collapses. Cave-ins pose the greatest risk and are much more likely than other excavation-related accidents to result in worker fatalities. It is estimated that one cubic yard of soil can weigh that of a car. Hazards associated with trench work and excavation are distinct and avoidable as OSHA standards necessitate that employers inspect trenches daily and as conditions change, before worker entry. OSHA also requires a safe access and outlet to all excavations, including ladders, steps, ramps, or other safe means of entry and exit for employees working in trench excavations exceeding four feet. Protective systems are also necessary. There are a few different types of protective systems, benching, sloping, shoring, and shielding.
Always inspect the trench before entering and never enter an unprotected trench. If you see any problems with a protective system, exit the trench immediately and inform the person responsible for trench inspection.

A Boston contractor was fined nearly $1.5 million for 18 violations that resulted in the death of two workers last year. The company owner also now faces manslaughter charges because he did not provide basic safeguards against collapse and the two men who were killed were never trained to recognize and avoid cave-ins and other hazards. OSHA’s New England regional administrator Galen Blanton stated, “We want to emphasize to all employees that trenching hazards can have catastrophic consequences if they are not addressed effectively before employees enter a trench.” Safety on construction sites is paramount, but especially in trenching, so investigate the trench meticulously before entering or before allowing other workers to enter.

The Risks and Bliss of Being a Crane Operator

Being a crane operator is often thought to be an elite position in the construction industry. To be a crane operator, one must go through extensive training and testing; but, the rewards for passing the crane test and building a reputation as a solid crane operator can be abundant. The pay is better. The cab is nicer. The stress of calculating the load and making a pick can be enormous. Local 478 crane operators have described the job as being “rewarding, but very stressful since not only do you have to worry about balancing the load, you also have to always worry about the different trades that you are working with and having to trust in them that they understand what the crane can do. Working with a new crew is always stressful, because it takes a while to trust each other. You also have to worry about the obstacles around you like underground and overhead utilities, while also constantly worrying about whether the ground below you is stable enough to carry the weight of the crane and the pick. Adding in things like pedestrians, passing cars, and trains that you can touch as they travel the tracks beneath you, can be stressful.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), crane accidents resulted in 307 crane fatalities from 1992-2006. The most common cause of death was overhead power line electrocutions. Crane booms or cables contacting an overhead power line represented 32% of crane-related fatalities. Crane collapse was the second leading cause of death at 21% while roughly 20% of these incidents were caused by cranes sitting on unstable or icy surfaces. Collapses caused by overloading the crane and shifting of the crane load or boom accounted for 16% and, the other 18% of fatalities were caused by a construction worker being struck by a crane boom/jib. The real tragedy is that most of these crane accidents were preventable.

Construction Accidents: The Emotional Toll

The costs of occupational injuries can be divided into three categories: direct costs, indirect costs and quality of life costs. Even with efforts to reduce the number of accidents and worker fatalities in our industry, construction accidents still account for a larger percentage of accidents and fatalities among all industries. Annually, fines and construction accident related costs exceed $10 billion for both fatal and non-fatal accidents.

When it comes to quality of life and construction accidents, we see where posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is rampant among workers involved in a construction accident. PTSD symptoms might include flashbacks, nightmares, scary and recurring thoughts, avoiding certain situations, feeling emotionally numb or depressed, being easily startled, feeling tense, having difficulty sleeping and angry outburst. While some workers are diagnosed and being treated for PTSD, others may not be aware they have it. If you are aware of a fellow worker who may have PTSD symptoms, you should encourage them to seek help. The Local has a confidential Members’ Assistance Program (MAP) that can assist them in finding professional help or conducting a critical incident debriefing. Allowing workers to discuss their traumatic experience as well as their reaction to the event is a powerful step in helping them process their emotions and possibly prevent PTSD. The Local’s members’ assistance program also offers education about the symptoms of trauma thereby normalizing one’s reaction to a tragic event.

Work Union: Work Safe

States with higher union population have a lower percentage of accidents and fatalities on construction job sites because union workers have higher skills, are better trained for hazardous situations and because they have the ability to involve a third party (the union) in any safety issue if they cannot make headway on their own. Union contractors are also known to be more stringent when it comes to safety rules and reporting accidents. This may be because many union contractors have developed multifaceted safety programs and training courses that they provide to their own employees. Union contractors are also strong advocates for union training programs that emphasize instruction in safety, OSHA and Hazmat.
So, if unions, trade associations, owners, and contractors all have some type of safety program in place, why do accidents keep happening? The most basic answer is just “the personal decisions that we make every day aren’t always good decisions.” Although we may not set out to hurt ourselves or others at work, many of us also don’t have a safety plan in mind when we arrive at the job site. In order for all of us to be accident free, “safety” has to become one of our personal components, namely a conscience commitment to working safely made by every individual as well as the entire group. On a daily basis, we need to take a minute to think about the men and women who have lost their lives in construction accidents. We need to be aware of the injuries, the near misses and the fatalities that can occur any day on the worksite. We need to also communicate with one another about the dangers and hazards of working in the construction industry so that we always remain in an attentive and prepared state so that we can adapt what we are doing to any sudden changes in our work environment.

Take Care of EMP for Greater Safety

My earliest safety days were at the Hartford Insurance Company in the 1970’s, where I was first taught about EMP (equipment, material, people). It was always emphasized that if one takes care of EMP, it can 1) aid in job analysis determination thereby helping to avoid accidents; and, 2) if an accident occurs, it will help narrow down and locate exactly what caused the accident. It is the why, what, where, when, who, and how of accidents and at the top of the report says “Job hindrances interrupt or interfere with the orderly progress of the job”, which the ultimate objective of the EMP report is to eliminate job hindrances. We, as an industry, can make this happen. As operating engineers, we need to be the ears and eyes on the job site.

If there is anything to take away from this special Safety Edition of our quarterly newsletter, it is that almost every accident is preventable. If all the parties are proactive, cautious and vigilant on the job site, then everyone should leave in good shape at the end of the shift. Always inspect your machinery or your surroundings and never be afraid to speak up if you see something that makes you feel uncomfortable. The union will send someone out immediately to inspect the situation. Your first step is to remove yourself and others from the dangerous situation. Second, tell your supervisor about the situation. Third, contact your business agent or call the referral manager or call me right away. And every step of the way trust that improving and ensuring your workplace safety begins with you.

No matter how expensive an accident is or how much damage the machine sustains, the one thing we can never put a price on is human life. Your life is important to us. We want you alive and well every day. We want you working, and we want you safe and enjoying life with your loved ones when you are not working in the trade. So be Safe.

Contact Information for Local 478 Business Manager, Agents, Safety Director and Referral

In the event, you find yourself on a job site facing unsafe conditions; please contact a representative from the union immediately. The following numbers are office numbers which are answered during normal business hours as well as agent cell phone numbers:

- Business Manager Craig Metz: 203-288-9261 ex.256
- Business Agent Garry Gyenizs 203-464-0221 (Plants, Shops and Equipment Dealers Statewide)
- Business Agent Allen Page 203-464-0219 (Plants, Shops and Equipment Dealers Statewide)
- Business Agent Chris Cozzi 203-671-9346 (New Haven County)
- Business Agent Duane Gates 203-605-3139 (Fairfield & Litchfield Counties)
- Business Agent Nate Brown 203-980-9169 (New London County)
- Business Agent Scott Swick 203-985-5893 (Hartford, Windham & Tolland Counties)
- Health & Safety Director Kyle Zimmer 203-537-2207
- Referral Office Tiana Ocasio 203-288-9261 ex.242

On-Line Resources

The following websites also provide information regarding safety in the construction industry

- www.cdc.gov
- www.nsc.org
- www.msha.gov
- www.osha.gov
- www.ehsfreeware.com
- www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com
2017 Spring/Summer Calendar

All events listed below will take place at the Local's Union Hall, unless otherwise noted.

Monday, May 29  MEMORIAL DAY (HALL CLOSED)
Thursday, June 1 (5:30 PM)  Examining Committee
Friday, June 16 (10:00 AM)  Active Retirees' Summer Picnic
  Anthony's Ocean View
Monday, July 4  INDEPENDENCE DAY (HALL CLOSED)
Thursday, July 6 (5:30 PM)  Examining Committee
Thursday, August 3 (5:30 PM)  Examining Committee
Monday, September 4  LABOR DAY (HALL CLOSED)
Thursday, September 7 (5:30 PM)  Examining Committee
Friday, September 8 (7:30 PM)  Membership Meeting