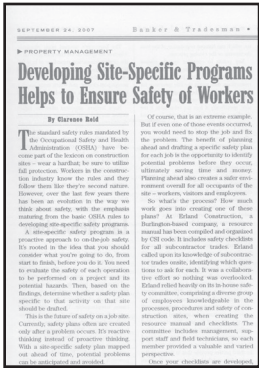


# THE CULTURE OF SAFETY



By  
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As seen in  
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The standard safety rules mandated by OSHA have become part of the lexicon on construction sites – wear your hard hat, be sure to utilize fall protection. Workers in the construction industry know these rules and they follow them like it's second nature. However, over the last few years there's been an evolution in the way we think about safety with the emphasis maturing from the basic OSHA rules to developing site-specific safety programs.

## What is a Site-Specific Safety Plan?

A site-specific safety program is a proactive approach to on-the-job safety. It's rooted in the idea that you should consider what you're going to do, from start to finish, before you do it. You need to evaluate the safety of each operation to be performed on a project and its potential hazards. Then, based on the findings, you must determine whether a safety plan specific to that activity on this site should be drafted.

This is the future of safety on a jobsite. Currently, safety plans are most often created only after a problem occurs. It's reactive thinking instead of proactive thinking. With a Site-Specific Safety Plan that's mapped out ahead of time, you can anticipate potential problems and avoid them.

This may seem like a lot of work, but let's consider a scenario that could occur without thinking ahead and creating a specific plan:

There's an existing trench on your job and because of its slope and the occupied building adjacent to it, you need a

trench box. Your first priority is to protect people from falling into the trench, so you close off the door nearest the trench and re-route pedestrian traffic. That was a good move, but the barricaded door violates fire emergency codes and creates an unsafe environment for your workers and the building's occupants. In the midst of this, your crew is digging and hits an oil tank that was identified in the site plans, but not marked for excavation. Finally, a truck delivering construction materials to the site, hits the overhead electrical wires because no one took the time to consider these deliveries and the height of their cargo. You've created a mess that could have been avoided with preplanning.

Of course, this is an extreme example. But, if even one of those things happened, you would need to stop the job and fix the problem. The benefit of planning ahead and drafting a specific safety plan for each job is in the opportunity to identify potential problems

before they occur, ultimately saving time and money. Planning ahead also creates a safer environment overall for all occupants of the site – workers, visitors, and employees.

## Creating a Plan

So, what's the process? How much work goes into creating one of these plans? At Erland, we have compiled a resource manual organized by CSI code that includes safety checklists for all subcontractor trades. We called upon our extensive knowledge of subcontractor trades onsite, identifying which questions to ask for each. This had to be a collaborative effort so nothing was overlooked. We relied heavily on our in-house Safety Committee – a diverse group of employees knowledgeable in the processes, procedures, and safety of construction sites – when creating our resource manual and checklists. The committee includes management, support staff, and field technicians, so each member provides valuable and



Through careful preplanning at St. Mark's School's in Southborough, Massachusetts the shoring of the existing roof structure in the Boiler Plant was recommended. New structural steel support was installed to allow for old arch brickwork to be removed.

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varied perspective.

Once your checklists are developed, it's important that your Project Managers and Superintendents buy into this process. It requires a lot of work from them, but their cooperation and follow-through is crucial to the success of a program like this. They are the people who are going to meet with the subcontractors and ensure that the rules mandated by the Site-Specific Safety Plan are being followed.

Now, the process in the field begins with our Superintendent and Project Manager and the foreman for each trade meeting before a project begins to complete the trade-specific checklist of safety questions. If many potential safety hazards are identified, you will need to consider drawing up a specific safety plan to head them off.

### **Who's Responsible for Putting the Plan into Action?**

Everyone is responsible for safety on a jobsite. The onus is on the subcontractors to follow the safety rules mandated by OSHA and provide a safe work environment. But the General Contractor is ultimately responsible for overall safety and for ensuring that everyone onsite is working in the safest manner possible. Alan Scott, Erland's Safety Director, said, "Erland is about making our subcontractor community safer than they were before they came onto our job."

It is with that idea in mind that we feel it's important to include the subcontractors from the beginning and get them directly involved in the process of creating a Site-Specific Safety Plan. They are the experts in their fields and they are the people who are going to be following these rules, so it makes sense that they be the authors of their own plans. Subcontractors must understand the conditions under which they will be working and take responsibility for creating a safe environment. The

General Contractor must assist and keep people on track, but each worker onsite has to be aware of potential hazards and the steps required in avoiding them.

### **Why Bother?**

Don't we have enough to do just to get a job up and running? Creating checklists and manuals, and getting cooperation from all the parties involved is a lot of work. Is it really worth all the effort? The simple answer is yes, because it creates a culture of safety on every level. It establishes accountability for everyone involved because after a Site-Specific Safety Plan is drawn up, everyone is responsible for following through on it. Of course, this isn't a perfect science and there still will be unforeseen issues that arise, but by taking a proactive approach, hazardous situations and costly remedies will be avoided.

### **About the Author**



Clarence Reid is a Safety Officer for Burlington, Massachusetts-based Erland Construction. His background includes over a decade of experience in the field of construction

safety compliance. Throughout his work history, he has been responsible for a variety of onsite safety-related functions including performing field inspections and implementing environmental health and safety procedures that were designed to produce best work practices.

In preparing this article, Clarence was assisted by Katie Fay of Erland's Marketing Department.