

MANAGING RISK PROACTIVELY

By Tim Neubauer

This article has been modified by the author to remove outdated information and is not in the original format it was published.

A few weeks ago I was attending a seminar and one of the speakers stressed that the most important aspect of risk management is mitigating or correcting hazard on a job site. I found this position to be reactionary at best. Wouldn't it be better to prevent the hazard before mitigation was necessary? You can't undo an injury or fatality correcting a hazard after an event has occurred.

The first duty of any employer is to identify hazards in the workplace environment. After a hazard has been identified, an assessment of how much risk is involved, and finally develop an appropriate mitigation or corrective action plan and implement it.

To do this, employers can use several tools, the most common one is a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) or a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA). This tool is used to document the steps to a task, the hazards associated with those steps and how the hazards can be eliminated or controlled before the task begins.

JSA's are unpopular to some people who think they are too time consuming, too hard to write and follow. Consider this:

If you were to study a task or job and determine the fastest, safest, and more cost effective way of performing that task, and then trained all the workers to do the task that way, you would expect productivity to increase, injuries to decrease and profits to soar. So how can we reach that goal? It's called a Job Safety Analysis, and it could be done once and reviewed each time after that.

There are several options for JSA's and their size and complexity depends on the task and the hazards associated with them. A condensed JSA can be a single page trifold with checkboxes to help workers fill them out. These mini JSA's are commonly referred to as Pre-Task Plans (PTP).

The next step is determining "how bad is it" and risk is perceived differently by people. What's ok for one worker is too dangerous for another worker. To develop a common scale or measure for risk, you could use the ANSI Z-10 risk matrix, or several other tools that allow risk to be quantified rather than be subjectively evaluated.

A risk matrix evaluates two factors:

frequency and severity of an event or hazard. Some matrix also considers a third measure, that of probability. The factors are added up and the total number is the risk factor. Based on a scale determined by the employer, the task is allowed, not allowed, or require actions or special equipment to be used when doing a task.

An example is an iron worker is not tied off at 15 feet while connecting, if frequency of exposure to a fall is daily that would be a very high exposure ranking. The next measure would be probability of the fall occurring, and because falls are the number one way for construction workers to die, we can assume that the severity ranking would also be high. Combine those two ranking and the task may be too dangerous. However, if we have the iron worker tie off to a suitable anchor point, their frequency and probability of a fall now drop significantly.

The last step is to act on the information and develop a corrective action to prevent to hazard or incident from occurring. Proactively managing risk will ultimately lead to the reduction of post incident mitigation.

