



Heightened regulation enhancing construction site safety: Improved training and education - by Douglas Winter

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Across N.Y., a building boom is underway. With it come increased risks of worksite injuries and fatalities. In NYC, the Department of Buildings reported that construction increased by over 300% since 2009 along with accidents by 97%. To head off potential accidents, the construction industry and municipalities have intensified their focus on safety.

In the Building Congress' 2016 annual report, its president Richard Anderson and chairman Richard Cavallaro of Skanska USA, Inc. jointly urged their members to "strengthen their efforts to ensure that workers are being properly trained and supervised and that best practices are being replicated at job sites throughout the five boroughs." Similarly, on Long Island and in upstate N.Y., industry groups are calling for safer practices. Heightened regulations are demanding improved safety training and education for construction companies. It's either that or they risk incurring high penalties or worse yet, an accident which causes serious injury or loss of life. Such was the case in the highly publicized crawler crane collapse in February of 2016. It took the life of a pedestrian, David Wicks, on his way to work in Manhattan. Understanding what is expected and adhering to best safety practices is critical for all construction companies.

NYC vs. Long Island

Construction site regulations vary from region to region. In NYC, it is essential that construction companies comply with chapter 33 of NYC's construction codes. Chapter 33 puts forth safety measures required during construction and demolition work. Effective May 30th, 2016, a new Construction Superintendent Rule (1 RCNY 3301-02) expanded the functions of the construction superintendent to include the following heightened responsibilities:

- Compliance with chapter 33.
- Work conforms to all plans.
- Designating a qualified, competent person to provide full-time jobsite safety supervision.

- Reporting accidents, damage to connecting properties, and any other issues to the N.Y. Dept. of Buildings via the BEST-SSM/SSC/CS hotline.
- Correcting any unsafe conditions.
- Inspecting the entire work site on each visit and maintaining a thorough jobsite log.

On August 30th, 2016, a new Construction Superintendent Rule (1 RCNY 3301-02) was enacted. It modified the types of construction projects that required a construction superintendent on site. They include: alterations of over 50% of an existing building floor area requiring special structural stability inspection, demolitions of over 50% of existing building floors, the complete removal of at least one entire floor/story, projects involving horizontal or vertical enlargement, and any project requiring special inspection for support of excavation or underpinning. The new rule requires that a construction superintendent be on site for any new building construction or full demolitions of existing buildings. The new rule also introduced the stipulation that an alternate superintendent may step in for the primary superintendent if that individual cannot perform the required duties on a temporary basis for up to two weeks.

Construction companies building on Long Island must follow the appropriate Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) provisions as contained in OSHA Standard Number 1926. Additionally, they must abide by their corporate protocol and any town codes that supersede OSHA, if they are more stringent. OSHA safety and health regulations for construction cover broad areas ranging from safety and health provisions, and safety training and education to fire protection/prevention, personal protective equipment, ventilation, hazardous chemicals, signage/barricades, material handling, etc. There also are specifications covering: hand/power operated tools; welding/cutting; electrical; scaffolds; fall protection; hoists, elevators and conveyors; motor vehicles, mechanized equipment; excavations; concrete/masonry construction; steel erection; underground construction; demolition; blasting/explosives use; electrical power; rollover protective structures/overhead protection; stairways/ladders; and cranes. OSHA has developed a 10-hour Construction Industry Outreach Training Program to train entry level construction workers regarding construction site hazards and prevention.

In NYC, no one is permitted on a scaffold unless they hold a NYC DOB 4-hour scaffold training certificate; in the City of New York a licensed scaffold erector and a full regiment of checks and balances must be in place. To assure compliance, the city fire departments monitor jobs closely, visiting job sites every two weeks, checking to ensure that there are fire extinguishers, water in the pipe, etc. Jobs deemed unsafe are shut down.

Companywide Safety Initiative

At Racanelli Construction Co., we're diligent about safety. As the company's safety officer, I check jobs on a weekly basis. In NYC, the project supervisor, and the project manager may at times be required to have designated fire watch at night and; based on a project's s/f, there are multiple

people performing the fire watch role. During the day, if a welding operation is underway or any task where sparks fly, there is a fire watch on hand during and after the operation for a period of time to make sure there is no fire hazard.

We have extensive safety plans in place and conduct demos to ensure our workers follow safe practices and know what to look for in their equipment in terms of wear, defective parts, sub-standard steel, etc. We want to make certain their equipment can withstand important strength requirements, and that their harness is put on and fastened correctly. We strive to stay abreast of all new OSHA regulations and enforce our workers wear the proper PPE; such as dust masks, goggles, and gloves water when mixing (e.g., silica) cement or cutting block.

Safety is imperative for workers and pedestrians passing a job site. It also has a positive impact on costs by reducing injuries, avoiding job shut downs, and containing insurance costs. Workers are more confident and less stressed when they are on a job where safety is paramount. The trades work better together and look out for each other which, in turn, help projects progress efficiently, on-schedule and on-budget.

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