



Cumulative change will have a positive impact on construction safety

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It is easy to recognize that the NYC real estate market is experiencing unprecedented levels of construction. Unlike past booms that were limited primarily to one type of development, this current explosive growth involves both the public and private sectors. In addition to a multitude of super high-end condos on both sides of the Hudson River throughout the outer boroughs and into Westchester, there are numerous office buildings exceeding one million s/f currently under construction. Public projects include the WTC Complex, the Fulton Rail Center, East Side Access, 2nd Avenue Subway, the #7 Extension, and a host of other multi-billion dollar capital construction projects for numerous agencies and authorities. This does not even consider the construction of new stadiums for just about every major sports franchise in the metropolitan area.

With this level of construction, it is inevitable that the number of accidents and incidents involving construction and the impact it will have on the public will increase. Due to the sheer volume of work, there will be a certain statistical increase and more people will be impacted. Experienced construction professionals at all levels, from senior project executive to field construction laborer, have had their limits tested.

Despite this never before seen level of construction and the inherent problems that come with it, the current administration is to be commended on its proactive approach to managing the impact it has had and will have on all New Yorkers. It has not been the typical knee-jerk reaction to isolated incidents but rather a long-term, concerted approach combining policy, rule change, and legislative initiatives over a sustained period of time.

Being in the construction industry for more than 20 years and acting as a safety professional the majority of my life, I have not seen anything that compares to the initiatives of the last several years that lessen the impact of construction for the public, and make it safer for working men and woman to go to home at the end of the day.

For five or six years the continual evolution of the NYC Building Department has undoubtedly had a positive affect on how construction impacts all New Yorkers. The current vision is one of facilitating compliant development with integrity, efficiency and professionalism. We have seen simple practical improvements in addition to major legislative change.

Practical changes include making the DOB website informative and interactive, e-mail distribution noting relevant updates, online filing, changing the requirements for contractors' signs, and low-rise construction safety initiatives. Then there are the significant rule changes such as Local Law 52 on Scaffold Safety, Registration Requirements of Construction Superintendents, Re-writing Reference Standards for Cranes, and the gargantuan task of revamping the antiquated NYC Building Code, achieving consensus, and having it passed into legislation.

The NYC DOB appears committed to becoming better as each day, week and year progresses.

Other significant rules and laws that attempt to manage the impact of construction include the passing of legislation and development of noise regulations. New York City recently overhauled its noise code. According to the NYC DEP website, "The new regulations try to balance the important reputation of New York as a vibrant, world class "city that never sleeps" with the needs of those who live in, work in or visit the city. The code was enacted in December 2005, and took effect in July 2007. This is the first comprehensive overhaul to the city's code in 30 years. These rules establish a unique noise mitigation plan for each construction site, offering alternatives for contractors to continue their important construction tasks while having less noise impact on the surrounding environment."

Many of the changes that have recently been implemented have taken significant time to work their way through the rule making or legislative process. It has taken months and sometimes years to achieve the changes we are now seeing. Many of the initiatives were started before anyone could have envisioned the volume of construction that New York is presently encountering. As a practicing safety professional even one incident or accident that injures someone is one too many, and there is no doubt in my mind that the initiatives that have been implemented have already achieved the objective of making NYC a safer place to live and work.

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