Communication in Multilingual Environments: Clarity Saves Lives Stats and Facts

FACTS

- **A Misunderstood Instruction Is a Hazard:** When a safety warning or procedure is delivered in a language a worker does not fully understand, the information does not reach them — and the hazard is not controlled.
- **Translation Is Not the Same as Understanding:** Providing a document in another language does not guarantee comprehension. Workers must be able to ask questions and clarify instructions in real time, especially during high-risk tasks.
- **Emergency Communication Cannot Wait:** In an emergency, a worker who cannot understand verbal instructions or evacuation signals faces a survival disadvantage. A missed or delayed response to a warning can be fatal.
- **Silence Is Not Agreement:** Workers who do not understand an instruction may nod or comply without knowing what is required. Assuming silence means comprehension is one of the most dangerous errors in multilingual workplaces.
- **New Workers Face the Highest Barrier:** Workers new to a site — especially those working in their second language — face elevated risk when they are most unfamiliar with hazards, procedures, and emergency systems.

STATS

- Language barriers are cited as a contributing factor in 25 percent of all job-related accidents in the United States, according to NIOSH research.
- In 2024, Hispanic or Latino workers experienced the highest occupational fatality rate of any group — 4.3 per 100,000

full-time equivalent workers – marking the eighth consecutive year this group led all others, according to the National Safety Council.

- Of the 1,229 Hispanic or Latino worker fatalities in 2024, 68.5 percent occurred among foreign-born workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Foreign-born Hispanic or Latino workers made up 8.2 percent of the employed U.S. workforce in 2021 but accounted for 14.0 percent of all work-related deaths that year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- In 2022, 18.1 percent of the U.S. labor force was foreign-born, with more than 67 million U.S. residents speaking a language other than English at home.
- Workers experiencing language barriers face increased risk of work-related injuries and encounter significant difficulty reporting those injuries to employers and workers' compensation systems, according to a 2023 study published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine, McMaster University, Ontario.