Contractors and You: What Workers Need to Know – Handout

What’s at Stake

Workers all have their areas of expertise and they develop impressive skills through years of experience. But being an expert machine operator doesn’t necessarily mean one is able to perform critical maintenance or repairs on that machinery.

That’s why your employer likely needs to bring contractors in to conduct such work. However, contractors may be unfamiliar with your workplace and some of the hazards that they might encounter there.

What’s the Danger

Your employer is required to ensure that safety is maintained in your workplace, not only for workers, but also for contractors. That means being careful about ensuring that contractors have good safety records and are qualified and certified to do the work, and also obtaining and checking references.

Still, your workplace may pose hazards that contractors are not aware of until the work they are performing causes an incident that either damages machinery or product, or injures contractors or other workers.

That’s why you are a vital part in the process of maintaining safety for all workers and contractors in your workplace.

Example

A contractor was blamed for a fatal explosion in China. The contractor was accused of violating building rules by using shoddy materials to install gas pipes.

The pipes, which should have been buried in an eight-inch (20-

centimeter) deep underground sand bed, were installed using scrap materials and they cracked under the weight of heavy traffic above.

The gas leaked and ignited in an explosion that created a hole 13 feet (4 meters) deep and 430 square feet (40 square meters) in size. Two people died and 15 others were injured in the blast.

How to Protect Yourself

Workers should introduce themselves to contract workers who come on to their worksite. Ask them what work they will be performing and be alert for any potential safety issues that could arise from those activities.

Getting to recognize who is on the worksite will also help you spot new people who suddenly appear and may have been subcontracted by contractors.

Subcontractors may also be unaware of hazards, so it’s a good idea to talk to them to determine what work they will be doing and assess whether they are aware of how their actions might negatively impact their own and others’ safety.

If you have any concerns from your conversations, you should talk to your supervisor. Workers should also watch contractors and subcontractors working and report any safety or health concerns they observe. For example, contractors and subcontractors have been known to inadvertently disturb controls or start up or shut down processes or equipment.

Such actions could lead to a deadly incident. That’s why you need to stay vigilant for errors made by others and speak up when you see them.

Final Word

You are responsible for ensuring your own safety, that of your co-workers and others, including contract employees who come into your workplace. If you witness a contract employee working unsafely, speak up.