Shared Economy and Gig Workers: Safety Beyond Traditional Employment Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

More workers than ever are arriving on job sites as contractors, day laborers, or through gig platforms. These workers bring real skills and fill important gaps, but they often arrive without the site-specific orientation, training, or relationships that permanent workers take for granted. That gap creates risk for the gig worker who doesn't know the site, and for the crew working alongside someone who hasn't been fully briefed. Safety doesn't change based on who signs your paycheck. But the systems that deliver it sometimes do, and that's exactly what this talk is about.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Insufficient Site-Specific Training

A gig or contract worker may have strong skills but no knowledge of this specific site. Where the emergency exits are, which chemicals are in use, where forklift paths cross pedestrian routes. Without an orientation, the worker is operating blind.

Pressure to Keep Up

Gig and contract workers often feel pressure to perform quickly and without complaint. That pressure leads to skipping steps or staying quiet about a hazard that feels risky to raise.

Unknown Hazards

- Contract workers may not know which areas are restricted or where overhead risks exist

- Site signage may use codes the new worker has never seen before
- They may not know who to ask, or whether asking feels safe

No Clear Chain of Reporting

Permanent workers know who to call when something goes wrong. A gig worker often doesn't know who their supervisor is or where to report a hazard. That gap means incidents go unreported and real hazards go unfixed.

PPE Gaps

- Gig workers may arrive with PPE that doesn't meet the site's standards
- Agencies don't always communicate PPE requirements to workers in advance
- Workers without the right equipment may try to work without it rather than risk losing the job

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Whether you're the gig worker arriving somewhere new or the permanent crew member working alongside one, there are things you can do to close the safety gap before the shift gets complicated.

Demand an Orientation Before You Start

If you arrive at a new site and are sent straight to work without any briefing or orientation, stop and ask for one. You are legally entitled to be informed of the hazards in your work area before you start. It doesn't matter whether you're a temp, a gig worker, or a sub-contractor. Refusing to start without an orientation is not refusal to work. It's a basic right, and exercising it protects everyone.

Ask About Site-Specific Hazards

- Where are the high-traffic or high-risk zones on this site?
- What chemicals, materials, or energy sources are in my work area?

- What is the emergency procedure and where do I report?
- Who is my direct supervisor and how do I reach them during the shift?

Check Your PPE Before You Commit to the Task

Don’t assume your standard kit is adequate for every job. When you arrive, check whether the site has specific PPE requirements and whether what you have meets them. If it doesn’t, say so before you start work. A site that sends you in without the right PPE has a problem. You are not the problem. Speak up before the task starts, not after.

Know Who to Report To

Before your shift starts, get the name and location of your supervisor or the site safety rep. Know what to do if you need to stop work, who to call if there’s an incident, and where the first aid station is.

Your Rights Don’t Change with Your Contract

Gig workers, contract staff, and day laborers have the same right to a safe work environment as any permanent employee. You have the right to refuse unsafe work, to report hazards without retaliation, and to receive adequate training and PPE. If you feel those rights aren’t being respected, you can contact your regional workplace safety authority.

Permanent Staff: Welcome and Brief Every New Face

If you’re a permanent worker and someone new shows up on site, don’t assume they’ve been fully briefed. Introduce yourself, point out the key hazards in your work area, and let them know who to go to with questions. A 5-minute conversation at the start of the day can prevent a serious incident before lunchtime.

FINAL WORD

The gig economy has changed how work gets done, but it hasn’t changed what workers deserve. Everyone on this site has the right

to go home in one piece. If the systems in place aren’t delivering that for everyone, say something.