

Partner with Customers to Improve Temporary Workers' Safety

Published January 2014

Last year, in response to the expanding use of temporary labor and reports of fatal injuries suffered by temporary workers, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced an initiative to further protect temporary employees' workplace safety.

To begin, OSHA directed its national field of administrators and inspectors to ensure that safety and health protections, including training, are in place for temporary workers. For example, inspectors have begun checking records and interviewing workers to assess whether temporary workers receive required training about worksite hazards in "language and vocabulary they can understand." Inspectors also document the name and address of companies' staffing suppliers, and the "supervising structure under which the temporary workers are reporting." Using a new data system code, OSHA is also tracking temporary workers' exposure to safety and health violations.

As part of its initiative, OSHA also reached out to the American Staffing Association and other stakeholders to better understand the staffing industry and increase staffing agencies' and host employers' awareness about their shared responsibility for temporary workers' health and safety. In July, OSHA representatives presented a webinar to American Staffing Association members to discuss recommended practices for staffing agencies and host employers to jointly address workers' health and safety. A compilation of highlights from OSHA's webinar to the American Staffing Association and subsequent Industrial Staffing workshop at Staffing World is presented at the end of this article.

Best Practice Model: Diversified Personnel Services

Alliance member [Diversified Personnel Services \(DPS\)](#), the staffing division of Opportunities, Inc., has solid procedures in place to meet OSHA's shared responsibility standard. DPS places over 2,500 job seekers each year, mainly in industrial settings throughout southeastern Wisconsin. They approach workplace health and safety through intensive training for workers and close collaboration with both their customers and workers compensation insurance carrier. In addition, the corporate Safety Team at Opportunities, Inc. collaborates with DPS on safety promotions and initiatives to create a comprehensive safety experience for employees and employer partners.

For its workers, DPS uses pre-placement worksite tours to introduce candidates to various industrial work environments. Account managers are trained and authorized to bring candidates to job sites on an "open door" basis, a practice that leads to better understanding of work settings and more successful placements. In addition, employees receive safety training customized to their individual communication needs and covering ergonomics and OSHA regulations related to hazard communications, lock out/tag out procedures, personal protective equipment and blood-borne pathogens. Candidates with limited English proficiency are provided translated materials in an appropriate format. Rehabilitation professionals also provide guidance on content to ensure basic understanding is conveyed in all training materials.

DPS ensures quality of service to customers through an active partnership with worksite teams and its worker's compensation insurance carrier United Heartland. DPS conducts regular customer site visits, including a quarterly visit with United Heartland's risk analyst. New customers receive a standard letter that describes DPS' Safety in the Workplace Awareness program, including information about their Safety Training Program for workers, employees' responsibilities, what to do if a DPS worker is injured on-the-job and DPS' Return to Work/modified duty program. Formal job order requisitions are developed by staff based on their industry experience and a walk-through/review of the worksite and job duties to accurately document the nature of the work to be performed, including comprehensive physical requirements. DPS also reinforces its safety messaging to customers with regular features in the "Safety Corner" of its monthly email newsletter.

DPS' recent collaboration with long-time customer Fisher Barton Specialty Products offers an example of their shared responsibility approach. Fisher Barton manufactures blades and other equipment for commercial mowers used in agriculture and construction, and at least 85% of DPS' placements with them are temp-to-hire. To maximize worker safety, DPS and the customer's Safety and HR teams looked at every position DPS staffs and created a matrix for specific safety training (over and above the standard training) required for each. The shared investment in customized training signals to workers that they are valued, increases their proficiency, and has resulted in higher retention and productivity.

While DPS' safety initiatives have proven successful in decreasing incidents on the job, unfortunate injuries do sometimes occur. In this case, DPS' Return to Work/modified duty program offers a viable solution to ensure the employee can seamlessly transition back into the workforce upon recovery. First and foremost, the DPS team will pursue employer accommodation with work restrictions. If that is not possible, the employee is offered modified duty work options at one of Opportunities, Inc.'s training facilities, supported by professional staff to monitor recovery and ensure successful re-employment. In this way, DPS can help injured workers remain at work and support their transition to external employment while also minimizing claims.

OSHA Webinar Recap

Following are highlights from OSHA's webinar on shared responsibility and a subsequent workshop at Staffing World.

Risk Assessment

Staffing suppliers, as part of their own safety and health program, should conduct a risk assessment with every new customer:

- Check the client company's historical safety record (OSHA Statistics and Data page).
- Discuss the temporary workers' job duties and description of work, and inform customers about any high-risk tasks that your temporary workers are prohibited to do.
- Discuss the company's safety culture.
 - Review client company's hazard assessment
 - Review their written safety program
 - Establish their intent to train workers and how this is documented
 - Ensure the site-specific orientation addresses applicable topics (e.g., procedures for lock out/tag out and powered industrial trucks)
- Evaluate working conditions, e.g., housekeeping, temperature, noise level, heights.

- Identify basic hazards of the work environment and how hazards are controlled, e.g., Personal Protective Equipment, machine guarding, handling of chemicals, pre-placement physicals.

Documentation and Continuous Improvement

To ensure that necessary protections are provided, your staffing company should:

- Include contract language that defines the scope of temporary employees' work.
- Present a safety partnership agreement that clarifies and assigns safety and health duties and responsibilities, including recordkeeping. In general, the staffing agency is responsible to ensure that employees have received proper training. In practice, staffing agencies provide basic training and the host employer provides workplace-specific training to the employees' particular tasks.
- Conduct follow-up evaluations to:
 - Make sure the environment remains safe with no changes.
 - Verify the customer has provided site-specific and equipment-specific training.
 - See that temporary workers are complying with training and working in accordance with job descriptions.
- Document your visits.
- Ask customers and workers what more you can do.

To assist with the risk assessment process, visit the Operations section of our Member Toolbox to download a sample Safety Inspection Checklist from DePaul Industries and a sample Job Order Requisition from DPS.