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Working Alongside Subcontractors

No matter what industry you are in, you are inevitably going to work around subcontractors or vendors quite often. The services of other companies are necessary to move work forward.

Like any new addition or change in a workplace, subcontractors can create many hazards for everyone working there. It is important to consider the hazards created when utilizing subcontractors and what can be done to mitigate the hazards.

Dangers of Working Alongside Subcontractors:

Any amount of new work tasks, no matter how small, will create additional hazards in that workplace for the employees who work there every day. The actual work tasks being completed by the subcontractor, along with what is already occurring at the worksite, will determine the specific hazards that need to be addressed.

The employees of the subcontractor can also be put in danger by the work that your company is completing. Subcontractors are often not familiar with the worksite as a whole or the specific work processes occurring in the facility or at the jobsite where they are completing their work. Think back to when you were a brand-new employee at the specific jobsite or facility at which you are working. Even if you were experienced in your position, the unfamiliarity of the work environment made work more dangerous.

Best Practices for Working around Subcontractors at the Field Level:

- Meet with the subcontractor prior to work beginning for the day to discuss work plans.
- Communicate your work crew's scope of work, the hazards created by the work you are doing, along with the safeguards that need to be implemented and followed in order to mitigate those hazards.

- Ask the subcontractor for their scope of work as well as their plan to mitigate the hazards of their work.
- Establish work area limits for each work crew and delineate walking paths if necessary.
- Schedule or work around each other's work tasks, when possible, to avoid taking unnecessary risks. (An example of unnecessary risk due to poor planning: The subcontractor working in an aerial lift underneath your crew is installing pipe nearly directly underneath of the lift.)
- Continue to keep open communication between each workgroup affected by the subcontractor's scope of work each day as well as the entirety of the project.
- Speak up to a supervisor if the subcontractor's employees are not following site-specific safety rules or procedures.
- Always stop work whenever a hazard is created that could injure anyone in that work area.

Summary:

Subcontractors are necessary for the completion of work in every industry. Even if they are an outstanding company with an excellent safety record, the mere fact that they are completing additional work in your workplace means new hazards will be present.

Take the time up front to address work plans, concerns, hazards, mitigation actions, etc., to help to ensure the job goes smoothly.

If conditions change where people are at risk of injury or property can be damaged, always use stop-work authority to get the situation corrected before proceeding.