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Course

Date

Construction Industry Hazards and Legal Solutions

Construction is not the best career choice for people that have a fear of heights, water, fire, or confined places. However, unlike phobias where fear is irrational, a construction site is filled with actual risks and dangers. In fact, construction is one of the most accident-prone industries, which is associated with high injury and mortality rates. Since the construction industry is particularly important but perilous, the government takes serious measures to address dangers associated with it. However, it should pay more attention to prevention rather than the mitigation of risks, and in particular, a system of punishment of employees for violating safety measures needs to be developed.

To start with, the construction industry is one of the most dangerous and difficult-to-regulate areas because of the physical and psychological risks associated with it. At the same time, this profession is particularly important considering the role of constructions and infrastructure in the life of each person. With the advancement of technology, some hazardous construction tasks have been delegated to machines, but still, the majority of work is done by humans. Meanwhile, daunting statistics show that “although construction represents only 6% of US workers, it produces 20% of the fatalities” (ElSafty et al. 174). To address this threat,

governments around the world develop comprehensive legislation to prevent and mitigate risks associated with the construction industry. Nonetheless, even though there has been a slight decrease in injury and death rates, the danger remains. The situation is further complicated by the fact that “building design, materials, dimensions, and site conditions are often unique, which requires adaptation and a learning curve from site to site” (Suárez Sánchez et al.). Respectively, it is not sufficient simply to develop a one-size-fits-all protocol since, in most cases, it would not help employees prevent or mitigate a hazard because of specific work-related circumstances.

Considering what makes this particular industry so dangerous, the essential factors comprise a variety of physical risks combined with the personal irresponsibility of workers. Workers are exposed to serious potential risks of falling from heights, suffering from a trench or scaffold collapse, being electrocuted, or injuring a limb as a result of repetitive movement, improper positioning, and the constant state of muscle tension. For instance, each year, 4,500 people get injured and 50 people die because of scaffold-related accidents, while falls from stairways and ladders cause almost 25,000 injuries and 36 deaths a year. Another important point to add is that suicide rates among construction workers are higher than average as long as these people have serious psychological pressure put on them.

Respectively, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) – one of the agencies in the United States Department of Labor – imposes regulations in eight major areas. These include both general requirements and training requirements in general safety and health provisions, scaffolding, fall protection, excavations, ladders, head protection, hazard communication, and electrical works (“Worker Safety Series”). For example, before scaffolds are used, workers are obliged to make sure that these are installed at least 10 feet away from

electric power lines, erected on solid footing, tightly planked, equipped with ladders, guardrails, midrails, and toeboards, and inspected by a competent person. As for fall protection, workers have to use safety net systems, guardrail systems, warning lines, and hole covers. OSHA also has developed an extensive classification and marking system to ensure that workers use only ladders suitable for a particular task and load weight. There are various protective systems for trenches that need to be installed by an OSHA-registered professional engineer. Other regulations include such simple but vital rules as, “Stairways having four or more risers or rising more than 30 inches must have at least one handrail,” “A Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) should be maintained for each chemical in the facility,” and plenty of others (“Worker Safety Series”). In addition, OSHA developed a safety checklist, which concerns eye and face, foot, hand, and head protection, scaffolding, electrical safety, crane safety, hazard communication, forklifts, and elevated surfaces (“Worker Safety Series”). All these regulations are communicated through annual guides published and distributed at federal expense. Also, a registered professional is trusted with the task to deliver rules and rights to employees at particular construction sites.

In addition, a comprehensive educational campaign can serve as an important risk prevention strategy. Before starting a new position, employees should undergo theoretical and practical training to learn about hazards associated with their future workplace, the safe placement of workers, and emergency measures. They should also be taught to identify the primary symptoms of various work-related diseases or injuries and to provide first medical aid. At the end of the campaign, employees need to pass a test on understanding safety policies and the consequences of not following them. More than that, each shift should start with a brief

orientation meeting and a basic medical check to ensure that all workers are capable of doing their work and aware of the project plan for the day (ElSafty et al. 178). An extensive system of punishment for workers who violate safety measures also needs to be developed. Depending on the seriousness of the violation and its consequences, an employee has to be fined, fired, or even incarcerated. When all these prevention measures have been implemented, the working environment is expected to become much safer. Also, construction workers need to be provided with regular psychological checks to identify symptoms of job burnout, anxiety, and depression and to prevent issues with mental health. While the government has to provide some general preventative and punitive regulations, the development of a comprehensive educational strategy is the direct responsibility of the construction company in question.

Lastly, construction hazards do not end with the final work on a building, and the contractor bears responsibility for safety and security from the primary stages of the project through its exploitation and until the dismantlement of the building. The initial selection of materials and project planning affects the health of workers and residents, and the environment in general. For example, a lot of countries prohibit the usage of asbestos in construction, as it can cause allergies and respiratory diseases (World Economic Forum 13). This is why the managers of a construction project should keep the interests and needs of all stakeholders, with no exception in mind, and be aware of different risks that their decisions may impose.

To conclude, considering the high level of risks and hazards that construction employees face, the industry is strictly regulated in terms of security and safety. However, little attention is paid to the prevention of dangerous situations, and both the government and particular companies have to develop extensive educational campaigns for construction workers. Finally,

authorities have to inform society about punitive measures that will be imposed on those who violate the rules of safety.

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