

The Safety Issue.....

BY EDWIN MORSE, PLS (Reprinted with permission)

Is safety an issue in your company? Or is it one of those things that get ignored in hopes that it will never be a problem? Do you remember Murphy's Law? There are indications that Murphy was an optimist. There is no question that there will be some type of accident on one of your projects; the question is when.

We can assume there is an ongoing safety program in your company. This means that management puts safety of workers on an equal footing with profits. Management has the responsibility to provide required safety equipment. Management also has the responsibility to provide safety training for the employees.

Employers have several responsibilities regarding the safety of people they employ. They should inform the workers of potential dangers, unsafe acts and situations. They should provide training for their employees to avoid or manage unsafe situations. They have the responsibility to provide safety equipment that would include first aid kits, traffic safety vests and warning signs. Special equipment for unusual situations might include lighted arrow boards for heavy traffic, bee sting kits, confined space entry gear.

"If the survey crew did find any of these unusual hazards they would be prepared ... Right!?"

Employers should have ongoing safety awareness and training programs. Workers tend to forget about their own safety if they are not constantly reminded. Management could make safety planning and awareness part of the planning for each new project. Nearly every

project has its own unique hazards. If a project is primarily in the road, perhaps a training session on proper signing procedures would be appropriate. There are signing diagrams available that cover many situations but no set of standard guidelines can cover every possibility. Training and planning are required.

If the project is a boundary and topo survey in woods and swamps there are no hazards, right? There won't be any poisonous snakes - not in Michigan. If the survey crew did find any of these unusual hazards they would be prepared and know exactly the best way to protect themselves. Right!? An employer with a safety program would not forget to review the dangers and safe practices in using machetes and chain saws when their workers will be cutting line through woods and swamps.

Safety is not a one-sided issue. Employees also have responsibilities. Assuming that the employer takes all the right actions, employees must also do their part to have a safe work day. Workers should actively participate in the training that is provided for them. They must apply that training on the job - all the time.

Many of the activities of a survey crew are potentially hazardous. Both management and workers have responsibilities to reduce the risk to personnel and equipment. It is true that safety training takes time away from getting work done. It takes a few minutes longer to put the traffic warning signs out. Avoiding and preventing accidents is much cheaper than paying the consequences.

Many surveyors justify not putting out the warning signs by saying "we're just going to be in the road a few minutes and there isn't much traffic." Most accidents take only a few seconds. There is no set time you must stand in the road

before a driver looks the wrong way at the wrong time. Are the few minutes saved, worth the possible consequences?

"Both management and workers have responsibilities to reduce the risk to personnel and equipment."

Suppose you need an angle and distance to finish the project. You put a few cones around the total station and tell the operator to watch for cars while he makes the measurements. While he is writing down the numbers, a truck backs out of a driveway and a car swerves to miss it. Your \$20,000 total station is a total loss, and the operator will spend several months in the hospital at a cost of over a hundred thousand dollars. If your crew cost is \$60.00 per hour, and you saved five minutes in not putting out the signs, that would have avoided the accident, what were you betting? You bet a possible loss of over a hundred and twenty thousand dollars against a possible payback of three dollars! Does your insurance company know about that attitude?

The OSHA rules and the permits required to work on highways were not developed to make money for the state. The purpose of the rules and permits is to protect the workers and the public.



Washington State Editor's Note:

We will be addressing safety at greater length in a future issue. I personally know three surveyors hit by vehicles. One died. On an adjacent project **TWO** were recently hit and killed. We had one hit a 13.8 KV power line with 25' prism staff (2 days in hospital with minor burns).