

# BUILDING A PROACTIVE AND ALIGNED SAFETY CULTURE IN CONSTRUCTION

By: **Paul Stone**, Environmental Health & Safety Director at Haugland Group LLC



**P**aul Stone is an experienced Environmental Health and Safety Director at Haugland Group LLC, with over two decades in construction. He specializes in building proactive safety cultures, aligning EHS strategies with operations and leveraging training, leadership and technology to improve job site safety outcomes.

## Shaping an Approach to Safety Leadership

Experience and training have shaped my approach to safety leadership. I have been involved in the construction field for over 20 years. When I first started, I was working with tools. Having the opportunity to begin my career as a tradesman gave me insight into how things work on the operations side of construction. Once my career evolved into a safety management role, I had the opportunity to work with various influential safety leaders in the industry who helped coach and mentor me.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to enroll in safety and management leadership courses that have further refined my safety leadership skill set. Training and educational experience are key to success in a safety management role. Understanding the organizational structure and goals helps shape your approach to Environmental Health and Safety management. Effective management training helps align a safety manager's style and approach with the organizational expectations.



## Building a Proactive Safety Culture on Job Sites

Building a proactive safety culture on job sites is accomplished by obtaining buy-in from all trades workers to the organizational safety program. It takes consistency in how you manage each employee throughout all phases of construction. Establish a great site-specific orientation that outlines all the organizational health and safety programs and expectations. Manage those expectations aggressively daily, refusing to become complacent. Lead workers to feel a sense of wanting to do the next right thing for themselves, their family and the organization.

Gain mutual respect between you and your workforce. Establish a safety committee that is a melting pot of trades across the project and hold biweekly or monthly meetings with them to discuss high-level safety protocols and trends that are working well onsite or that need improvement.

## Trends Shaping EHS Strategies in Construction Today

Technology is a major trend shaping EHS strategies in construction. Software programs are now available to EHS managers that help develop risk assessments, job hazard and site safety inspections. This software is available on a user's phone, at their fingertips. tool, an EHS manager can take a photo of a project area, assign a task, and have a quality JHA available for review, developed by the AI tool in seconds. This cuts down on hours of administrative time an EHS manager would have spent drafting the JHA, allowing them to spend that time in the field conducting hazard assessments and managing.

## Balancing Safety with Project Timelines

Communication and participation are key. The safety department needs to be represented in project meetings from the bid scope through project closeout. Listening in meetings to timelines, scopes of work, and anticipated execution methods for tasks allows an EHS manager to stay ahead of the curve on upcoming high-hazard work, training needs, and material orders for PPE and other safety equipment.

It is very important for operational and safety managers to communicate with each other and run in parallel throughout the project schedule to avoid downtime for training personnel, lag time on orders, incidents, and time lost to incident recovery.



## Understanding the organizational structure and goals helps shape your approach to managing Environmental Health and Safety



## Advice for Aspiring EHS Leaders

Network with other EHS leaders. Many EHS leaders in the industry have expertise in specific subject areas. Exchange stories and ideas with them. Ask where they obtained their training and knowledge. Become a student of the game. If there are areas that you feel you need improvement in, do your homework on that subject until it is second nature to you.

Be comfortable with being uncomfortable. EHS leaders must be able to have tough conversations with others while maintaining professionalism and confidence in what they are doing. Keep obtaining continuing education and professional development, never feel you've graduated, and keep striving to be better. **EB**