



CONSTRUCTION AMONG THE “HOI POLLOI”

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There really isn't a way to do a construction project on planet Earth without some kind of possible exposure to the general public. The “Hoi Polloi,” as the ancient Greeks dubbed them, entrust us with keeping them safe as we pave our roads, erect our houses, hospitals and sports arenas, and continue to build the world in which we live.

Our most basic commitment as safety professionals is Safety (with a capital “S”), but with regulatory compliance often guiding, if not leading, our company Safety policies and procedures, our focus can be unintentionally narrow. Keeping our workers safe is absolutely vital... they are our friends, family, colleagues, and our ethical responsibility. However, we must also widen our approach to make sure we are keeping everyone else, including visitors, passers-by, pedestrians, and even trespassers, from being injured because of our work or worksite hazards.

In an April 22, 2015 *Wall Street Journal* article, ‘Around New York Building Sites, A Little Known Threat’, the author details that “at least once a month on average, a passerby is injured near a New York City construction site by anything from falling bricks, hammers and glass to windblown fences and collapsing sidewalk sheds.” While we may not have quite as much construction going on in Detroit as they do in New York City, the challenges and hazards of doing construction work in public spaces are certainly as difficult to manage.

We could spend the entirety of *CAM Magazine* going over risks of legal action,

potential worst-case scenarios, definitions of “negligence” vs. “intentional torts,” and debating whether lawyers have the public's best interest at heart; but instead, let's look toward the principal reason we all got into safety in the first place - to keep people safe. Let's not get bogged down in the minutia of whether we are protecting our worker, a passerby, a visitor to our site, or a trespasser. Our goal should always be to eliminate hazards in an effort to keep EVERYONE safe, regardless of who they are.

So, as you look at your worksites, remember to look for hazards: around your site, adjacent to your site, and if the wind picks up or gravity happens, what protective measures are prudent within the areas/fall-zones surrounding your site so that everyone goes home safe-and-sound. Also, how should we be protecting the public from the same hazards that we require our workers to don hard hats, safety glasses, etc.?

For example, if our workers are working near sidewalks or public spaces, how do we keep machinery, tools and materials from becoming a hazard in “public” areas? If a sheet of plywood is blown off a roof like a paper airplane, where will it go? If there are electrical cords running through public spaces, how do we keep the guy texting and walking from tripping on them? Tricky, right?

The reality is there isn't a one-size-fits-all fix for all hazards on our sites. Keeping people safe from themselves is a hazard we cannot always control, but maintaining a

safe jobsite for our workers and anyone who may be near our jobsite is certainly something we can work towards. Due diligence is key. It is something we are morally and legally obligated to do, in fact.

If you have questions on how to be most effective at protecting the public, please take a look at the ANSI Consensus Standard: ANSI/ASSE A10.34-2001 (R2005), Protection of the Public on or Adjacent to Construction. It is a great place to start. Also, if you Google “Lawyers and Construction Liability,” you will get just shy of 32 million hits worth of lawyers with all the claims they have won stemming from alleged worksite negligence. And don't forget to ask your peers, colleagues and mentors - in fact, the CAM Safety Committee is a fabulous place to ask a question.

Anticipating, identifying and abating or eliminating hazards allows us to have a safer worksite for our workers and anyone else who just happens to be nearby. Stay safe out there – and thanks for keeping it safe for my son and me as we admire the new construction project going on just down the street! 💎

About the author:

Carl Granger is a Certified Safety Professional (CSP) and has been in the field of safety and human resources for over 15 years. He is currently the safety director for Woods Construction and the president of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) Greater Detroit Chapter. Carl is an active member of the CAM Safety Committee and a past presenter at the CAM/ASSE Safety Leadership Conference.