



Should you be obligated to provide safety instructions in your employees' primary language?

[Employers should not have to] ... hire interpreters, rewrite materials in different languages, or otherwise create special conditions in order to follow [OSHA] rules.

- Andy Hannan



The GC should use whatever strategy is necessary, possibly including hiring an interpreter, to make sure that all employees fully understand safety requirements.

- Peter Davis

OSHA RULES

Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations make it crystal-clear that employers have a regulatory obligation to ensure that every employee has been given the necessary information and training to perform their job duties safely. If you think your going to beat OSHA on this issue, forget it.

Where I disagree with this premise is in the idea that employers should create special conditions in order to follow these rules.

COMAPANY CULTURE

I believe that the culture of the company sets the tone for how its employees should behave and communicate on the job. We treat all employees the same regardless of their language. But everyone should be able to communicate in English on our jobsites. When necessary, we help make this happen though English-as-a-second-language classes and some "cross-training," using Spanish-speaking employees to teach a few Spanish phrases to the others.

Our Culture extends to subcontractors as well. We make it clear that if subs send non-English-speaking employees to our jobsites, they must have someone with them who can explain the job and the rules. In situations where a non-English-speaking subcontractor is doing something unsafe or isn't following directions, Mark IV employees know to stop that work and get his English-speaking supervisor or reschedule the work.

Ensuring safe communications should not be the sole responsibility of employers. It should be mutual. We find that the employees who want to get educated are the ones worth keeping. If they don't want to learn, they probably don't belong.

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YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

I believe that it is the responsibility of the general contractor to clearly communicate safety training to anybody who works on his or her jobsite. The GC should use whatever strategy is necessary, possibly including hiring an interpreter, to make sure that all employees fully understand safety requirements. Jobsite accidents pose a tremendous liability, and I consider the OSHA regulations a wake-up call.

All of our immediate employees speak and understand good English. But the OSHA regulations are highly relevant to our cub contractors, many of whom speak Spanish. And since we're responsible for the safety of our jobsites, we monitor our subs to make sure they're meeting all safety requirements and other wise communicating with their employees about the need to leave jobsites clear of fall hazards and other public nuisances.

NECESSARY COMMUNICATION SKILLS

That being said, I also think it is in the best inters of employees to be able to communicate effectively on the jobsite using English.

It is in our best interests as well. We produce high-end, great-quality product, and basic communication skills are party of the package. If someone has the skills and attitude, I'm happy to work with them as long as there's a real intent to learn English. I am not opposed to learning Spanish myself, either.

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