



# Cutting Corners on Safety Doesn't Save Money!

I remember the call like it happened yesterday. I received a call from a tower erection company on the East Coast needing tower rescue certification. I went through the regular spiel on our program and then he asked me the standard question "HOW MUCH?" I worked up a price for the 15 guys he said need their certification and started to look at calendar dates when I could free up a couple of instructors for a trip out east. Then he hit me with the statement I never thought I would hear "I don't want the training! I just need to buy the cards!" He then went on to say he needed tower rescue certification in order for his crews to start a job the following week and was quite willing to pay whatever price we asked if we would just sell him the cards. Sorry Charlie! Our ethics are not for sale!

After he called me a few expletives and hung up on me, I started thinking about what kind of company he must run and what it must be like to work for a company that takes safety and training so lightly. In the interest of making a buck this individual clearly demonstrated that he would cut corners and compromise every employee's safety and well-being. In the end, he didn't care if one of his employees got killed, he just wanted that dollar! Call me naïve, but I really wanted to believe that those kinds of companies didn't exist in the tower erection industry.

But it isn't just our industry that these types of stories are told. Companies across the nation are looking for ways to cut costs, and for some, safety has been an area that has seen its share of corners cut! Think about some of the news stories we have heard in the past couple of years regarding catastrophic outcomes secondary to cutting corners on safety. Some that come to mind include: a major oil spill in the gulf that will haunt us for years to come that has been (at least in part) attributed by some to result from workers being forced to skip maintenance requirements and safety protocols; 500,000,000 salmonella tainted eggs caused 1900 people to become ill after egg farmers decided not to disinfect the henhouses to save money; and all of us share the concerns over the highly publicized cases of airlines cutting safety inspections of aircrafts in order to keep costs down.

As a business owner I am very sensitive to cost management. As a safety professional I know there are places cuts should never be made and what the consequences might be. Yet it happens and we are seeing it more and more.

Training is a classic example. In the past year, I have had several former students tell me that their certifications have expired, but their employer is holding off sending them for recertification until the work environment improves. That is a hard statement to argue with! Sort of a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation. I can appreciate how spending the money for recertification when jobs are slow coming in is seen by some as an unnecessary expense. At the same time, holding off obtaining the required recertification while allowing the employee to continue to perform high risk activities with expired certifications can lead to catastrophic results, especially if an accident occurs. The cost of the claim(s) and potential penalties can (and often will) put a company out of business.

Cutting corners happens. Whether it is failing to provide proper PPE, neglecting training that is considered a basic industry standard, or failing to perform and/or act on the required job safety analysis for every job site, cutting corners happens. But cutting corners on safety is not a form of prudent fiscal management. It is a method of trying to save money that will, in the end, cost more than it ever saved. Employee health and safety programs, including the training component, cannot be cut. While every employer has the fiduciary responsibility to identify ways to reduce operating expenses, he or she also has the legal, moral, and ethical obligation to provide every employee with a safe work environment. Trying to cut costs through the safety and training program is counter-productive. In the end, you may not only end up costing the company a small fortune, you may end up costing someone their life as well.

Stay safe and stay in touch!

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