

BUILDING INDUSTRY HAWAII

Housing

Despite red tape and rising costs, residential building permits skyrocket

Steve Colón, Hunt Companies
Hawaii Region President

What's Inside

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INFRASTRUCTURE

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WANT FROM BIDDERS

SERIOUS HAZARDS AT
CONSTRUCTION SITES



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Better Safe than Sorry

OSHA calls for national attention to hazard risks on building job sites

BY PRISCILLA PÉREZ BILLIG

A 20-year-old roofer fell 35 feet to his death through a skylight of a Kalihi business last July. Two months earlier, a residential construction worker fell off an eight-foot ladder and suffered a fatal head trauma, broken ribs and a punctured lung.

Falls are the leading cause of construction fatalities and account for one-third of on-the-job injury deaths in the industry, according to the Campaign to Prevent Falls in Construction, a joint effort by government, labor and management. Each year in the U.S. more than 200 construction workers are killed, and over 10,000 are seriously injured by falls from roofs, ladders, scaffolds, lifts and towers.

Diantha Goo, administrator with the Hawaii Occupational Safety & Health Division (HIOSH) of the state's Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, says she studied records going back 25 years and found the same types of fatalities repeatedly



Safety courses and demonstrations provided by Safety Systems & Signs Hawaii.
PHOTO COURTESY SAFETY SYSTEMS & SIGNS HAWAII

occurring. “We look at the broad things when we do inspections,” Goo says, “but I am trying to get people to focus on those things that cause people to die at work time and time again.”

Besides falls, Goo finds that heavy equipment—backhoes, excavators, loaders, cranes and forklifts—are at the center of many accidents. Last year a 61-year-old worker on a construction site in Kihei was struck and killed by an excavator.

Goo adds that operators and workers may fail to identify workplace hazards, crews may use equipment when not all safety components are operational, or an operator might crash into other equipment that falls or tips over. Electrocution is another danger when working with high voltage and failing to use proper protective gear or cutting off the power source.

“As expensive and slow as it is to implement certain safety measures, it is really

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cheaper than having an accident,” Goo says. “Also, you don’t have the case where a family is plunged into poverty because its main wage earner is either dead or permanently disabled and the family now has to figure out how to care for this person. Fatalities are just the tip of the iceberg.”

Goo says contractors must consider the hidden costs associated with maintaining poor safety standards. There are the medical bills incurred, co-worker grief trauma which may account for work inefficiency or sick days, rate hikes in insurance premiums, investigation costs, retraining costs and equipment repair or replacement.

“Everybody has to work together and just decide that we are not the kind of state where people have to

die at work,” Goo says. “We have to convince the building industry to provide the education that keeps their workers safe.”

The General Contractors Association of Hawaii offers OSHA training courses in Honolulu and Safety Systems and Signs Hawaii offers OSHA training in Mapunapuna. Safety consulting firm Lawson & Associates, Inc., affiliated with the University of California-San Diego OSHA Training Institute Education Center offers OSHA training courses at BIA-Hawaii’s Construction Training Center in Waipahu.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) encourages construction site managers to participate in a National Safety Stand-Down



Nakeli Pascua coaches a worker on the Castner Substation project.

PHOTO COURTESY LAWSON & ASSOCIATES

Construction Contractors’ To-do List

- Plan ahead to get the job done safely.
- Provide the right equipment.
- Train everyone to set up and use the equipment correctly.

HIOSH: It’s the Law

- Provide a place of employment that is safe and free from recognized hazards.
- Make reports as required by the rules and regulations (e.g., report some accidents within 8 hours).
- Maintain records as necessary (i.e., injury and illness reports, employee exposure records, medical surveillance records).
- Post posters and information as required (e.g., Hawaii Labor Law poster, OSHA-300A log, citations).

aimed at preventing falls May 4-15. The event calls for a safety activity, such as a toolbox talk, equipment inspection, rescue plan development or discussion about job-specific hazards.

“Now is the time for all of us to renew our commitment to sending workers home safe every night,” Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez said in a press release. “Last year’s stand-down showed us what employers and workers sharing that commitment can accomplish.

“Responsible employers understand that safety is not a luxury—it is a necessity. No one should have to sacrifice their life for their livelihood, because a nation built on the dignity of work must provide safe working conditions for its people.” 🏠