CORNER CERTIFICATION

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Certification and Re-certification - One Reason For

We are asked from time to time “Give me one good reason why I need to be certified in my job that I have been doing for 5, 10, 15, 20 years?” I have a very good answer for that question and it was from an incident that happened to the city of Bangor this last winter. During the winter the city lost an employee due to an industrial accident. It was the first fatality the city has had in over 25 years. The last one was from an accident at the municipal airport. This one occurred when a motor pool employee was working on a piece of snow removal equipment that had broken a hydraulic line. The mechanic had worked for the city for over 25 years and will be sadly missed by all. The Motor Pool was not in our division of the city workforce but the investigation crosses all departments and divisions of a company or city.

For those of you that have been lucky enough to never go through an OSHA or Bureau of Labor investigation, it is an experience that will open your eyes. They started their investigation by going over the accident, but then go through the complete city or company looking at all the safety procedures, training and documentation. I stress the last part the most. Yes, the safety procedures and training are extremely important to reduce employee accidents, but after the fact, it can be the documentation that can cost your municipality or company dearly. I realize that fines after an accident are never as bad as any industrial accident, no matter how small, but documentation of your procedures and training are extremely important. We thought we had a good training program set up at our Operation and Maintenance Division for the city of Bangor and were actually pretty proud of what we had accomplished. Yet after going through the investigation we realized we were badly lacking in one major area - the documentation.

Our division, Electrical, was fined for not providing documentation for any training that we had. We are still in the middle of this investigation and are assembling all paperwork for the six people in the Electrical Division in the hopes of reducing or eliminating the fine. The areas that are best documented are Work Zone Safety - six employees certified, Traffic - five of the employees certified, one Level I, three Level II and one Level III, Fire Alarm - two certified, one Level I, one Level III, Signs and Markings - one Level III, Roadway Lighting - two certified Level I. Of the six people in the Electrical Division three have master electrician’s licenses. We have to provide documentation for all National Electrical Code update programs that we have had.

Fortunately, all this paperwork, plus a copy of any job related courses that the city paid for are in our employee record folders. It was very unnerving to be “written up” for not documenting our training when we had all this paperwork, but it is the responsibility of the city or company to provide it to the inspectors when they asked do you have any records of your training sessions. At the time we did not realize the importance and took it for granted that we were trained, we knew we had gone through the training and were certified, and the Safety Officer for the department didn’t realize the documentation that we had done in our job specialties. After putting all the information together we realized we had better documentation then we realized, but up until know we never placed the importance on all those pieces of paper. We are very fortunate in our division that we did have as much as we did, not all departments had as much. The Risk Management officer for the city stated it very well when he said: “you can have the best training programs in the world, but if you can’t prove it, it won’t matter when you are investigated.

One of the best ways to prove your people are trained in their job is to get them certified so you have all the records you need. I am not stressing only IMSA certification but any that affects your employees, it can be from a simple lock out - tag out program to driving a fork truck, but you must document all training no matter what.

I would like to point out a way that all of our members can check out the latest news. It is to visit our web site, sign in to the Members Only page, get involved in the forums and be sure to check up on the latest developments happening with our programs and see what stage they are in. www.imsasafety.org is a great way to learn the latest about IMSA.

I hope to see all of you at our next Annual International IMSA Conference in 2005, at the TradeWinds Island Grand Resort, in St. Pete Beach, FL August 26 - September 2, 2005. The last time we were there, we had a great time and I know we will all enjoy it again.