

# SAFETY TOOL KIT

## 2013: Michigan Construction Deaths on the Rise



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**2013** has already been a tough year for construction safety. Last year, there were a total of 26 MIOSHA-related deaths. 2009 saw the lowest number with 24. But only three months into 2013, we've already buried 11 Michigan workers.

On March 21, 2013, MIOSHA reported 2013's 10th work-related death. In response to that announcement, the CAMSAFETY Committee had a discussion via e-mail which offered up a few suggestions about what could be contributing to such a sharp increase in construction fatalities in the first quarter of the year. Ideas included:

1. The recession forced many contractors to seek work outside of their comfort zone, resulting in employees performing work tasks without experience, proper training, and/or necessary equipment. Residential contractors are working on commercial projects and commercial contractors are expanding into industrial worksites. In addition, Michigan-based companies expanded their footprint into neighboring states. This trend of diversifying has created a large group of workers who are expected to learn as they go. They are unfamiliar with the hazards they are now exposed to, and lack the necessary experience to adequately protect themselves.
2. Employees who have been out of work for an extended period of time need just as much safety/refresher training as someone who has never been in the field. Employers need to be providing refresher training and stressing that jobsite safety is equally as important as productivity. Relying on computer-based training or instruction provided by a previous employer does not meet requirements as specified by MIOSHA.
3. A reduction in revenue required employers to cut expenses. Training and staff devoted to jobsite safety were often the first to go. Also, routine maintenance was suspended and purchasing anything new was simply not an option. In many cases, workers are using outdated, barely-functioning tools, vehicles, and other equipment.



4. The contractors who have survived the recent economy are now expanding rapidly to meet the growing demand in Michigan. Michigan is one of only four states that show job gains in construction since June 2009. Michigan's expansion is concentrated in specialty trade contractors, while the building construction sector continues to shed jobs, due to a poor housing market. Companies are hiring at record rates and a proper worker safety orientation is being pushed to the side in an effort to get projects adequately staffed as quickly as possible.

I put together a synopsis of the above and sent out an e-mail to more than 4,500 industry contacts. I received some feedback that suggested another potential reason for the sharp fatality increase: Last year's rescission of 611 MIOSHA standards, as identified and recommended by the Office of Regulatory Reinvention. Many safety professionals, including CAM's Safety Committee, spoke out against the proposed revisions but the damage was already done. Michigan's recent push to deregulate business is sending a message to our workforce that MIOSHA's enforcement efforts will be suspended and underscores the perception that safety is less important than productivity.

As we enter the second half of 2013, I ask that all Michigan contractors take a moment to reflect on their own safety efforts. Have you reduced your training regimen? Failed to provide workers with necessary equipment? Stressed job deadlines over the importance of working safely? Asked someone to perform a work task or operate a piece of equipment when they lacked training or experience? If you identify a weakness in your program, shore it up. Contact me about the free training and assistance options offered through CAM. Reach out to the Consultation, Education and Training (CET) Division of MIOSHA. Talk to your provider of workers' compensation insurance, trade unions, and other industry associations to find out what they can do for you.

Remember: No job is so important and no task is so urgent that we cannot take the time to do it safely. ☘