

Holiday Temps – 'Tis the Season to Prepare!

If your business uses temp workers during the holiday season, now is the time to get your workplace safety strategy together.

Temporary holiday employees are at higher risk of injury because they are not familiar with your workplace and generally have less experience with the work tasks they are performing. Studies on injury rates for temps indicate that they suffer workplace injuries at a significantly higher rate than permanent workers. To keep your holiday temps safe, you need a plan to ensure that they are afforded the same quality of workplace protection as your permanent employees.

Because temps aren't with a company for the long haul, many employers try to minimize the money spent on them. However, skipping safety is not a good place to pinch pennies—an injured temporary worker is likely to cost you far more than the safety training and/or protective gear you decided to forgo.

There are ways to both provide a safe workplace for temporary workers and keep your costs down:

- **Limit Temps' Job Tasks:** Often, permanent employees and supervisors see temps as an opportunity to delegate their work. This means temps do a wide variety of job tasks, which, in turn, exposes them to a wide variety of hazards. To reduce their exposure, limit them to very specific job tasks or job classifications. This can reduce the amount of safety training necessary and, in some instances, the need to supply personal protective equipment (PPE).
- **Determine In Advance What Training Is Needed:** Temps should be made aware of the types of hazards that exist in your workplace. This is true whether you hire the workers "off the street" or from a temporary employment agency. (While the temp agency may bear some responsibility for general workplace safety training, you are responsible for ensuring that the temps you use are aware of the hazards specific to your workplace.) Closely evaluate the positions where you will be using temps and determine what training is necessary in order for them to work safely. For example, are there fall hazards? If not, you can eliminate your usual fall protection training. No lifting hazards? Reduce the scope of your ergonomics training.
- **Where Possible, Mix Temporary Employees With Permanent Employees:** One of the big risk factors for temps is their lack of experience. If you keep groups of inexperienced temporary employees together on work crews, you are more likely to have an incident. Have your temporary employees work with your experienced permanent employees who can model safe work procedures.
- **Provide Increased Supervision:** Because of their lack of familiarity with your workplace, temps need more supervision than regular employees do. Prior to assigning temps to a supervisor, discuss with the supervisor the need to provide clear, complete instructions (that is, don't assume the temps know all the specifics about your workplace that your permanent employees do) and to observe their work behaviors more closely.