

**1999 Construction Safety Conference**



# **Safety Strategies and Annual Awards**

**Northwest Construction Consumer  
Council**

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## ***THE ‘DEADLY THIRTEEN’***



# **MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS OF CONSTRUCTION SAFETY**

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## Outline

- Background
- Myths and Realities
- Recommendations

**...It is always best to start at  
the beginning.**

Glinda, The Good Witch of the North  
in “The Wizard of Oz”

## What is a Myth ?

- A commonly held belief
- Thought to represent reality
- A kernel of truth lies at its core
- A shortcut to thinking
- A guide to action

## Key Focus

Problem Definition:  
You must start with diagnosis

## Why Worry About Myths?

- At best, you get a gap between expectations and results
- Usually, you get all kinds of undesirable problems
- Worst case, you wind up with a disaster

## Results of Misguided Efforts

- An Exercise in accelerated error
  - not easily halted or corrected
- Insidious damage from poorly conceived solutions
  - the ‘fix’ is worse than the problem
- Cascading failure
  - each problem drains resources away from new initiatives, starving them and leading to failure with them as well

## GIGO: Garbage In, Garbage Out



Intelligent planning and problem solving  
starts with, and depends upon,  
a valid perception of reality



**Alia Tentanda Via Est**

MYTH #1



SAFETY IS ACHIEVABLE,  
ZERO ACCIDENTS IS NOT

MYTH #1



SAFETY IS ACHIEVABLE,  
ZERO ACCIDENTS IS NOT

**Reality: Zero Accidents is an  
achievable goal, Safety is not**

MYTH # 2



SAFETY IS A “THING”  
OR AN ACTIVITY

MYTH # 2



SAFETY IS A “THING”  
OR AN ACTIVITY

**Reality: Safety is a result. It is  
what you get if things are done  
right**

MYTH # 3



SAFETY IS BEST DEALT  
WITH SEPARATELY

MYTH # 3



SAFETY IS BEST DEALT  
WITH SEPARATELY

**Reality: Separation severs the  
connection with the system**



MYTH # 4



OSHA COMPLIANCE  
GENERATES SAFETY

MYTH # 4



OSHA COMPLIANCE  
GENERATES SAFETY

**Reality: OSHA compliance gives  
you compliance with OSHA**

MYTH # 5



THOSE WHO DO NOT  
INCLUDE SAFETY HAVE  
THE LOW BIDS

MYTH # 5



THOSE WHO DO NOT  
INCLUDE SAFETY HAVE  
THE LOW BIDS

**Reality: Safer contractors have  
lower costs of production and  
the lowest evaluated bids**

MYTH # 6



*JUST SETTING UP A  
SAFETY PROGRAM  
SOLVES THE PROBLEM*

MYTH # 6



*JUST SETTING UP A  
SAFETY PROGRAM  
SOLVES THE PROBLEM*

**Reality: A program is not a  
system, it is only part of one**

MYTH # 7



AUDITING AND  
INSPECTIONS DELIVERS  
SAFETY

MYTH # 7



AUDITING AND  
INSPECTIONS DELIVERS  
SAFETY

**Reality: Inspection only tells you  
the defect rate of your process**

MYTH # 8



OSHA STATISTICS  
MEASURE SAFETY  
PERFORMANCE

MYTH # 8



OSHA STATISTICS  
MEASURE SAFETY  
PERFORMANCE

**Reality: Statistics measure non-safety, the rates of failure**

MYTH # 9



INCENTIVE PROGRAMS  
PRODUCE *LASTING*  
RESULTS

MYTH # 9



INCENTIVE PROGRAMS  
PRODUCE *LASTING*  
RESULTS

**Reality: Incentives are toxic, long term, as they become entitlements**

MYTH # 10



DISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS  
ARE *THE KEY* TO  
ENFORCEMENT

MYTH # 10



DISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS  
ARE *THE KEY* TO  
ENFORCEMENT

**Reality: Individual ethics are  
the key, discipline is a support**

MYTH # 11



THE SOLUTION LIES IN  
FINDING SOME NEW  
TECHNOLOGICAL “FIX”

MYTH # 11




THE SOLUTION LIES IN  
FINDING SOME NEW  
TECHNOLOGICAL “FIX”

**Reality: Accident prevention is  
a major social system issue**




MYTH # 12



CONSTRUCTION IS TOO  
COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC,  
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT  
TO DO

MYTH # 12



CONSTRUCTION IS TOO  
COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC,  
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT  
TO DO

**Reality: Zero accidents, and we  
know how to do it**

MYTH # 13



THE SAFETY PROFESSION  
IS REALLY INTERESTED  
IN SOLVING THE  
PROBLEM

MYTH # 13




THE SAFETY PROFESSION  
IS REALLY INTERESTED  
IN SOLVING THE  
PROBLEM

**Reality: The safety profession is  
deeply problem co-dependent;  
no problem, no profession.**



**Respice Finem;  
Venienti Occurri to  
Morbo**



If you don't run the job right, it  
doesn't matter how much noise  
you make about safety--  
it won't be the result

# PRE-EMPTION



Mishap prevention  
through  
Intelligent Intervention

## Primary Emphasis



- Focus on organization and structure
- Process
- Majority of activities are pre-construction
  - a construction project is like a rocket: the trajectory is set at launch

**Objective:** A coherent strategy

## Risk Management System

- Designed to reduce or prevent unacceptable risks
  - mission of resilience: giving the business the capacity to resist and survive shocks and other disturbing events
- Includes multiple processes and programs
  - programs have finite boundaries
  - processes are open-ended, a sequence of activities that continually cycles
- Must be integrated to function together

REALITIES

## SAFETY IS NOT:

**A SEPARATE PROJECT ISSUE,**

**IT IS AN INSEPARABLE PART OF THE  
PROCESS OF RUNNING A GOOD PROJECT,**

**IT IS AN END, THE RESULT  
OF ACTIONS TAKEN ON THE JOBSITE**

**It's Your Choice**



**Pay Attention**

**or**

**Pay The Price**

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