



ODOT Safety First Training

· Highway construction work is potentially dangerous. Workers operate heavy equipment, work with electricity and, in the case of bridge construction, work high above the ground. Specialized safety training addresses these and other dangers. As the Oregon Department of Transportation repairs or replaces hundreds of bridges throughout the state through its OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program, the agency is including safety training in its workforce development efforts.

Recently, 20 candidates for heavy highway trades apprenticeships completed the 10-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration training in eastern Oregon. The training covers detailed safety procedures in the use of electrical tools, eye protection, trenching and heavy equipment, as well as emergency scenarios such as dealing with downed electrical lines. Specialized training for bridge construction involves learning about harnessing and scaffolding, and about how to safely perform construction work above your head, essential when working beneath a bridge.

"The OSHA 10 training gives people the knowledge they need to succeed in the construction industry," said training lead Randy Peck, health and safety manager for Oregon Bridge Delivery Partners, the company assisting ODOT in the management of the bridge program. "The training makes a lot of sense both for the employee and for the industry, because the direct and indirect costs associated with major incidents are huge."

According to Peck, the training involves more than simply hands-on practice of procedures. It also gives students the knowledge and skills to analyze any assigned task and work out safety issues before beginning work. For example, the training might help a worker spot a potential fault in a scaffold before climbing onto it.

The OSHA 10 safety training is part of the agency's implementation of its Workforce Development Plan, designed to expand the number of qualified people—especially women and minorities—available to work on highway projects. ODOT collaborated with the Oregon Employment Department, Bureau of Labor and Industries, and WorkSystems Inc. to develop orientation classes to help candidates meet apprenticeship requirements to enter into the heavy highway construction labor pool. Those requirements include academic and skills testing, registration in a job database, and now OSHA 10 training. Eighteen of the 20 participants in the eastern Oregon sessions were Tribal Employment Rights Office members from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

· OSHA 10 training wasn't originally required for apprenticeship orientation, but contractors requested it. Worker safety is a priority throughout the bridge program, and ODOT has now added OSHA 10 training to all future orientations.

"It's a wonderful plan to conduct these trainings across the state," Peck said. "The bottom line is that workers are more knowledgeable and safer because of the OSHA 10 trainings. It's a win-win situation for everyone."

Skilled highway construction workers are in demand in the Portland metro area and across the state as ODOT repairs and replaces hundreds of bridges through the \$1.3 billion bridge program.