Using Technology to Create Safer Jobsites

by DR. PETER KOCHEVAR, C.T.O.

THE UNIONIZED CONSTRUCTION industry continues to place high importance on a safe jobsite.

Mandatory drug testing, safety training and job-specific orientations are evidence of this priority. Additionally, the high cost of insurance premiums and workers' compensation claims provide greater motivation. The challenge is how to reliably, securely and cost-effectively keep track of worker qualifications so the information can quickly and easily be accessed whenever and wherever it is needed – particularly at the jobsite.

In many cases, each trade keeps track of worker qualifications in some way. Contractors must then either call the trade offices for qualification results or access a trade-sanctioned website. A worker who is an electrician must be checked in one database while an ironworker must be checked in another — a very time-consuming and costly task. Furthermore, an electrician from Detroit might have his or her data in the local's database, which is inaccessible to a contractor wanting to use the same worker on a job in Cleveland.

And what happens to this information if the trade decides to switch to a different drug test vendor, or there is a dispute and the vendor cuts off access to the database?

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What about those trades that do drug testing and require workers to take safety courses, too? Often, the drug test vendor maintains its own database of results while the safety test vendor maintains a separate database for its results. Again, contractors are forced to check multiple databases to determine if a worker is compliant with work rules.

Ultimately, for a safe and secure jobsite, contractors need to check worker qualifications on the spot. But compliance checks at jobsites are infrequent, and even when they are done, the process is complicated, time-consuming and ineffectual.

place in Internet-based systems. Rather than having to log onto several different websites to check on a worker's qualifications, the Internet can be used to link databases owned by trades around the country. This technology allows local organizations to share qualification information with one another and, by extension, with contractors.

Think of it as analogous to the banking industry's ATM network. Each local organization maintains total control of its workers and their qualification information. Yet, a Cleveland contractor wanting to employ a worker from Detroit can quickly and easily check that worker's qualifications, thus eliminating an extra drug test and saving time and money.

Rather than keep different pieces of information in "silos" – on servers and computers accessible to only a small group of people at one location – the unionized construction industry must take advantage of the sweeping changes taking place in Internet-based systems.

The simple solution to all of these problems is the prudent use of technology. The first step is for contractors and the trades to change the way they traditionally think about data. Rather than keep different pieces of information in "silos" – on servers and computers accessible to only a small group of people at one location – the unionized construction industry must take advantage of the sweeping changes taking

For checking worker compliance "on the spot" at jobsites, the Internet, coupled with cellular phone technology, again provides a solution. Developers have created systems, known as Rules-Based Jobsite Access Control™ (RBJAC), that allow a worker's credentials to be automatically authenticated as soon as he or she scans an ID card to gain admittance to the site. RBJAC systems can have manned or unmanned access points that wirelessly communicate with databases to control access based on a set of rules such as a worker must have a valid drug test, pass certain safety courses, and view a jobsite orientation movie. If the worker has the proper qualifications, the turnstile or lift-arm gate is unlocked and he/she is allowed to enter. This type of technology also allows authorized administrators to view who is on a jobsite 24/7 via a Web browser. As an added benefit, data collected by the turnstiles or lift arm gates can be used for payroll validation, thus cutting down on payroll fraud.

By readjusting old attitudes about data and how it can be shared, the union construction industry can streamline the way contractors and unions do business and enjoy a new level of efficiency and cost savings. ■

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