

Business clients must provide site-specific safety training

Editor's note: This article is the second half of a two-part series about co-employment and the business client's role in managing short-term or supplemental (temporary) employees. For information about the staffing agency's responsibilities, please see last month's newsletter.

For most business clients, the allure of employing supplemental workers through a staffing agency is about creating a short-term situation in which they can assess a person's strengths for a core position or complete a project without getting too wrapped up in managing the individual or providing costly benefits.

Acting as a co-employer with a staffing agency is a great way to reduce overhead during tough financial times or overcome short-term needs, for which it does not make sense to hire a full-time employee. An added bonus is that the agency will oversee hiring and firing the individual, addressing disciplinary concerns, negotiating the nature of the job and its pay rates, and evaluating performance. For the most part, business owners can just sit back and watch the work get done.

However, Leddy Group Vice President of Human Resources Susannah Chance says it is important that business clients understand their responsibilities when it comes to the supplemental employee. In addition to working with the staffing agency to determine the length of the assignment, supervising the employee's daily work and controlling the work environment, the biggest role a co-employer has is ensuring that safety measures are in place and introduced to each employee before they start working.

Of course, industrial business clients tend to have more responsibilities than their non-industrial counterparts when it comes to site-specific safety training, but regardless of the work environment, Chance said co-employers cannot overlook their duty of educating everyone about their safety procedures.

"I think it's easier for non-industrial clients to forget about safety procedures because they don't have as many accidents as our heavy industry clients do," said Chance. "However, they have slips, trips, falls and ergonomic issues. They also have risks of fire and medical emergencies, so the people management issues are the same, it's just the work performed that is different."

To assist partnering businesses in this capacity, Fran Lefavour, Risk Manager at Leddy Group, said her company trains and begins these safety conversations with their employees prior to placement and checks in with them to ensure their new co-employers address additional issues on the first work day.

"Before we send anyone to a job site, our supplemental field employees have already viewed a safety training video and they have learned about personal protective equipment, fire evacuation, Material Safety Data Sheets and 'lock out tag out'," said Lefavour. "At the end of the first day, we do a First Night Check with each employee to ensure they have received the site-specific information as well."

At the start of the first work day, Lefavour said a human resources representative, safety director or supervisor should do a walk-through with each field employee to discuss fire

and evacuation procedures, and show them the closest exits to both the bathroom and cafeteria areas.

“The other thing the client company would be responsible for,” said Lefavour, “is telling them where the company’s meeting place is once they are outside of the building in the event of an emergency. Generally they should be saying to them, ‘leave, don’t try to fight the fire and meet under the maple tree.’”

Additional site-specific training that should be done, depending on each employment opportunity, includes providing supplemental employees with personal protective equipment, explaining Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) and where they are located, and ensuring that certification and training is available to motorized power jack and fork lift drivers.

Lefavour said co-employers must make personal protective equipment available to employees and show them when and how to use it. She adds that exceptions apply when the equipment, such as eye glasses with prescription lenses and steel-toed shoes, can be used outside of the workplace. If a supplemental field employee is not using the personal protective equipment at the appropriate times, Leddy Group representatives should be notified immediately so they can rectify the situation.

She said MSDSs are an important Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulation that explains what kinds of substances a short-term, field employee may be in contact with. The information provides answers to commonly asked questions, addresses protective clothing and disposal or spill procedures. Not having MSDSs on site or not cluing workers in on where they are located can result in costly OSHA fines, said Lefavour.

The risk manager suggests that co-employers log this kind of safety training for their own records and protection. However, she says that information should be compiled into one general training file that contains sign-off sheets for each employee as companies should never maintain files on any supplemental staff member.

Lastly, she adds that while the staffing agency oversees workers’ compensation and any insurance claims for injuries — which are at the heart of all of these precautions — co-employers must remember to log and record all injuries on their OSHA logs. These injuries should be addressed the same regardless of whether the employee is full-time or supplemental because the OSHA logs are site specific.

Lefavour said this site-specific training is an issue that both her company and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) take very seriously.

“We have made drastic reductions in our workers compensation costs because we take safety seriously, we have procedures in place and they are followed,” she said. “We provide an overview of the steps our business clients need to take in each customized proposal and we are always happy to answer any questions they may have.”

Aside from overseeing daily tasks and providing site-specific safety training, Chance said that business clients acting as co-employers have very few responsibilities when it comes to overseeing the role of a supplemental field employee. However, she adds that it is essential that clients fully understand their function in that partnership and create

open lines of communication between their company and the staffing agency so questions and problems can be addressed in a timely, effective and legal manner.

For questions about co-employment, site-specific safety training or a business client's role in managing a supplemental field employee, please contact your Leddy Group representative or call (603) 749-4810.