

The Commercial Construction Safety Planning Guide

for Owners & Developers



Broad Reach
Construction

A practical guide to reducing project risk, protecting people, ensuring compliance, and building safer construction sites from preconstruction through project completion.



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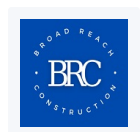
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Introduction: The Owner's Stake in Construction Safety

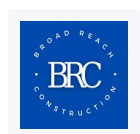
The success and reputation of any construction project hinge not only on budget and timelines but also on the safety record achieved from groundbreaking through completion. For owners and developers, prioritizing construction safety is about protecting your investments, your people, and your brand. A safe jobsite reduces liabilities, prevents costly delays, and signals professionalism and responsibility to investors, tenants, employees, and the public. In today's commercial construction landscape, owners' decisions and involvement can make or break a project's safety outcomes.

Many owners mistakenly see safety as the contractor's responsibility alone. However, as a leader or developer funding and directing the work, your actions and expectations set the overall tone for every contractor and worker entering the site. Understanding your crucial role in fostering a safety culture, assessing risks, and demanding high standards is essential. This guide is designed to equip you with knowledge, tools, and checklists, helping you drive better project results while safeguarding lives. Whether you develop hotels, schools, offices, warehouses, or healthcare facilities, the principles in this guide will help you establish a foundation for success.



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**Safety brings
first. Because
you are
responsible
for everyone
who enters
your jobsite.**

Anonymous Construction Superintendent



Why Safety Matters for Owners & Developers

Commercial construction safety isn't just a regulatory box to check; it is a business imperative with far-reaching implications. For owners and developers, creating safe jobsites means actively mitigating risks to revenue, schedule, reputation, and future opportunities. Safe practices help ensure workforce stability, support project efficiency, and foster trust among stakeholders—from financiers and designers to tenants and the wider community.

Incidents and accidents are far costlier than most realize. Beyond medical or insurance payouts, an injury can trigger project shutdowns, legal action, negative media attention, and lasting reputational harm. In a competitive industry, today's accident can mean tomorrow's lost client or disqualified bid. By leading an intentional focus on safety, owners and developers position themselves as responsible partners—protecting not only workers but also their own investments and long-term interests.

Owner Benefits of Prioritizing Construction Safety



Lower Project Risk

Safer jobsites experience fewer severe incidents, reducing change orders, claim disputes, and insurance premiums while protecting your bottom line.



Reputation Protection

A proven record of safety attracts partners, investors, and tenants while reducing liability and ensuring project eligibility for high-profile clients.



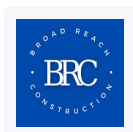
On-Time, On-Budget Delivery

Minimizing accidents keeps your schedule intact and your crews productive, avoiding delays, shutdowns, or costly overtime caused by safety lapses.

The Hidden Costs of Safety Incidents

When a safety incident occurs on a jobsite, visible costs like medical treatment or property damage are just the tip of the iceberg. Hidden costs—such as productivity losses, morale issues, administrative burdens, and reputational damage—can far exceed the initial impact. Projects may halt for investigations. Key personnel might be reassigned or demoralized after witnessing or responding to an incident. Subcontractors and labor may become harder to retain if word spreads about site dangers.

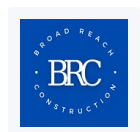
Legal costs, regulatory fines, and insurance claims may linger for years, driving up premiums and disqualifying your firm from future projects. Additionally, serious incidents attract negative attention from the media and local communities, putting both your current and future developments at risk. Recognizing and planning for these indirect costs is essential for every owner aiming to maintain profitable and sustainable operations.



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The true cost of a workplace injury goes far beyond medical bills. Injuries disrupt lives and can derail entire projects.

National Safety Council



The Owner's Influence on Project Safety Outcomes

Owners are uniquely positioned to shape jobsite safety outcomes. Your expectations for safety—clearly defined in contracts, meetings, and preconstruction documents—set the tone for every contractor and trade. Early integration of safety goals, ongoing oversight, and active participation in safety reviews create an “ownership culture” that values incident prevention as a core project metric. When owners treat safety as a performance requirement rather than an afterthought, project teams take notice and respond accordingly.

Including safety metrics in contractor selection, participating in safety walks, and requiring regular reporting on safety issues can elevate safety performance across all participants. Owners who lead by example—insisting on high standards and never turning a blind eye to risk—give safety the authority it needs to become embedded at every level of the project. This guide will show you how to put these principles into practice, from design through handover, using proven strategies and real-world examples.

Chapter 1:

Understanding

Construction Risk

Construction sites present a unique blend of hazards, each with the potential to cause injury, disrupt work, and jeopardize project success. Owners and developers must understand these risks not just to satisfy regulations, but to drive proactive prevention. Common causes of jobsite injuries include falls, struck-by incidents, electrical contact, and caught-in/between hazards. These are not just random occurrences, but predictable—and therefore preventable—when addressed through comprehensive planning and oversight.

A strong grasp of construction risks empowers owners to anticipate challenges, ask informed questions, and set non-negotiable standards during contractor selection and daily oversight. Effective risk management starts with awareness of the most common and severe threat categories, as well as those activities and environments—like steel erection, roofing, heavy equipment operations, or confined spaces—that historically produce the most serious outcomes. By understanding the underlying dynamics of construction risk, owners can make informed decisions that reduce the likelihood of devastating incidents.



Four Most Common Jobsite Hazards



Falls from Height

Including falls from roofs, ladders, scaffolds, or through openings. The most common cause of fatalities.



Struck by Object

Involving moving equipment, dropped tools, or flying debris. Preventable with strong controls and awareness.



Electrocutions

Contact with power lines, tools, or energized circuits. Temporary power setups require special consideration.



Caught-In/Between

Workers trapped in or between machines, materials, or structures. Proper procedures and equipment safeguarding are vital.

OSHA's "Fatal Four" & High-Risk Activities

According to OSHA, more than half of all construction worker deaths result from just four types of incidents: falls, struck-by, electrocution, and caught-in/between. These "Fatal Four" hazards represent the greatest threats and are present, in various forms, at nearly every construction project. Owners and developers must focus on these risks when setting requirements and evaluating safety programs.

Certain high-risk activities—such as steel erection, crane lifting, excavation, and working on roofs—require even greater vigilance. These jobs often involve complex logistics, simultaneous work by multiple trades, and changing environmental conditions. Owners are encouraged to require additional safeguards and reviews for projects involving these activities, and to work with contractors who demonstrate extensive experience in managing such risks.



Impact of Incidents on Schedules and Budgets

A single major safety incident can derail a commercial construction project both financially and operationally. Direct costs—such as medical expenses, property repairs, or regulatory fines—are only the beginning. Owners often experience ripple effects: schedule delays during investigations, higher insurance premiums, re-work, and strained relationships with clients and regulators. Workforce replacement and retraining can cause further slowdowns. Depending on the severity of the incident, project deadlines can be missed by weeks or even months, leading to liquidated damages and lost tenant or client revenue.

Careful risk management is as essential for protecting the financial health of a project as it is for preventing personal harm. Owners who budget for extensive safety oversight and enforce strict compliance often find that these 'upfront' costs more than pay for themselves in avoided incidents and delays.

Chapter 2: Building a Safety Culture Before Construction Begins

True jobsite safety begins long before shovels hit the ground. Owners who prioritize safety integrate it into every decision—from site selection and design reviews to bidding documents and contractor interviews.

Establishing a safety culture early sets universal expectations and prevents safety from being sidelined under commercial pressures. The most effective owners treat safety planning as an integral component of overall project delivery, embedding it in every phase.

During preconstruction, owners can require contractors to submit comprehensive safety programs, proof of past performance, and detailed plans for proposed site-specific hazards. Setting clear expectations, defining responsibilities, and evaluating contractors' safety histories are critical steps. Early focus on safety generates buy-in from all stakeholders and builds a foundation for continual improvement throughout the project's lifecycle.

Steps to Embed Safety in Preconstruction



Integrate Safety in All Documents

Make safety requirements explicit in RFPs, contracts, and pre-bid meetings to deter unsafe bidders early.



Prequalify and Evaluate Contractors

Review written programs, EMR, OSHA citation history, and references for past performance on similar projects.



Set Clear Project Expectations

Communicate safety KPIs, minimum requirements, and owner's commitment to every bidder from the start.

Evaluating Contractor Safety Records

Owners should rigorously prequalify contractors to ensure that crews entering the site are committed to safety. Review each bidder's safety program documentation—does it cover site-specific hazards, emergency protocols, orientation, employee participation, training, and continuous improvement?

Examine lagging indicators like Experience Modification Rate (EMR) and Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR), but also ask for leading indicators: recent safety initiatives, reporting culture, near-miss tracking, and engagement with workers.

References and OSHA history are equally important. A record of repeat violations, stop-work orders, or unresolved corrective actions indicates deeper issues. By gathering robust data and seeking out contractors who go beyond compliance, owners create a safer, more disciplined project environment from the very beginning.



Chapter 3: Developing a Site-Specific Safety Plan

No two construction sites are exactly alike. That's why every project should have a tailored safety plan reflecting its unique hazards, layout, and sequence of operations. Owners should require contractors to produce and follow a site-specific safety plan before mobilization. This document should address logistics (e.g., traffic flow, delivery points, laydown areas); hazard identification and controls; personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements; and emergency procedures. Owners who are actively engaged in reviewing and approving these plans gain greater assurance that foreseeable risks are addressed before work begins.

The plan should be a living document—updated as site conditions evolve, new phases begin, or new subcontractors join. It must be communicated to all team members at orientation and reinforced during daily briefings and toolbox talks. Robust planning makes all the difference between a workplace that merely 'complies' and one that genuinely protects everyone on site.

Site Logistics, Hazard Identification & Communication Protocols

Effective logistics and hazard identification start with a thorough site evaluation. Before construction, map out entry and exit routes, designate separate paths for vehicles and pedestrians, and identify locations for storage, work areas, restrooms, first aid, and emergency assembly points. Systematic walkthroughs with all stakeholders—GC, subs, owner's rep, and key trades—help spot potential hazards like power lines, unstable ground, overhead hazards, and adjacent operations. These walkthroughs should result in a site map and prioritized hazard list.

Communication is equally critical. Consistent daily and weekly safety meetings, clear signage, and posted emergency contacts keep everyone informed. Emergency protocols should be specific: designate team leaders for fire, medical, weather, or security events, and ensure every worker knows how to summon help and locate safety equipment. Establishing accountability and communication procedures before work begins prevents confusion and saves lives in a crisis.



Chapter 4: Contractor Selection & Safety Evaluation

Selecting the right contractor is one of the most important safety decisions an owner will make. Each contractor's approach to safety—reflected in written policies and demonstrated performance—should be scrutinized along with price, schedule, and quality. Owners should require evidence of current insurance, workers' compensation, and EMR below industry average. Recent OSHA inspection history and any record of serious violations should receive special attention.

Don't hesitate to request documentation for the contractor's safety program, incident reports, and proactive improvement efforts. Conduct in-person interviews or site visits to see firsthand how safety is managed. Proactive owners go further—insisting that safety management be led by a qualified individual, and that all phases of work have clear accountability for hazard controls and emergency response.

Essential Safety Questions for Contractor Selection



What is Your Safety Track Record?

Ask about EMR, OSHA recordable rates, and record of citations or near-misses. Genuine transparency is a good sign.



Who Are Your Safety Leaders?

Require resumes and credentials for onsite safety personnel. Identify who holds day-to-day responsibility for hazard controls and reporting.



How do You Handle Training and Communication?

Assess requirements and documentation for worker orientation, daily briefings, and communication of site safety changes or emergencies.

Chapter 5: Managing the Big Risks—Falls & Elevated Work

Falls are the leading cause of fatalities in construction, accounting for more than one-third of all jobsite deaths. For owners, rigorous fall protection programs are non-negotiable whenever work is performed at height—on roofs, scaffolding, aerial lifts, or formwork. Contractors must identify all elevated work areas and specify required protection systems: guardrails, personal fall arrest systems, safety nets, and fall restraint devices. No exceptions.

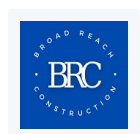
Particular attention should be paid to work on unfinished roofs, steel erection, and lift operations. Owners should require daily inspections of all fall protection equipment and verify that workers are properly trained and using PPE consistently. Insist on stopping work if unsafe conditions are observed—owner intervention saves lives and sets high expectations for everyone on site.

Roofing, Steel Erection, Lift & Protection Strategies

Roof work presents unique fall hazards, from unprotected edges to fragile surfaces and weather-related risks.

Require contractors to install guardrails, warning lines, or safety net systems before work begins. Steel erection often involves work at great height with shifting loads, so lifeline and tie-off requirements should be above industry minimums. When using aerial lifts or scaffold towers, contractors should provide fall restraint systems rated for the equipment and task—and workers should be trained on inspection and emergency descent.

Owners should require documentation of daily inspections for all fall protection systems and insist that deficiencies are addressed immediately. Mandate that only trained, certified workers perform elevated tasks, and periodically review compliance through surprise audits or owner-led safety walks. Active monitoring demonstrates an owner's commitment and signals absolute seriousness about risk prevention.



Chapter 6: Electrical Hazards & Lockout/Tagout Procedures

Temporary electrical installations are found on nearly every construction site, powering lighting, tools, and heavy equipment. These setups introduce energized equipment that can turn deadly if not properly managed. Owners must insist that temporary panels, cords, and connections are professionally installed, inspected regularly, and maintained in accordance with NFPA 70 (National Electrical Code). GFCI protection and routine visual checks for damaged cables or outlets are mandatory.

Lockout/tagout procedures are vital for any work that may inadvertently energize equipment or circuits. Require contractors to provide written LOTO policies, train all applicable workers, and require strict use before work begins on any equipment or circuit. The owner's role is to ask questions, review documentation, and walk the site—a visible owner commitment changes behavior. Ensuring all subcontractors and visitors comply with electrical safety standards is also essential to preventing injury or project disruption.



Coordinating Subcontractor Compliance

Owners and prime contractors are responsible for ensuring every subcontractor understands and follows lockout/tagout and other electrical safety procedures. Subcontractor agreements must reference compliance standards and require training records for all electrical workers. During site orientations, owners should stress that compliance is not just a contract term, but a condition of continued work on site. Random audits, clear signage, and supportive reporting programs encourage teams to speak up about unsafe conditions or violations. Ultimately, the owner's visible insistence on compliance drives a culture in which shortcuts are not tolerated, benefiting every worker—and every project milestone.

Chapter 7: Heavy Equipment, Site Logistics & Traffic Management

The movement of cranes, forklifts, trucks, and excavators creates constant risk on commercial jobsites. Owners should require comprehensive site traffic management plans—mapping out delivery routes, laydown areas, pedestrian walkways, and restricted zones. Clear signage, barricaded traffic paths, trained operators, and designated signalers keep people and vehicles safely separated. Owners should demand daily inspection logs for all heavy equipment and enforce policies prohibiting untrained personnel from operating machinery.

Excavation and materials handling introduce their own set of risks, including cave-ins, struck-by incidents, and vehicle/pedestrian collisions. Owners can dramatically reduce incidents by insisting on trench protection systems, competent person supervision, and required spacing between heavy moving equipment and work crews. These requirements must be included in bid documents, preconstruction meetings, and ongoing owner reviews.

Crane, Forklift, and Excavation Safety Essentials

Crane and forklift operations require certified operators, routine maintenance, and strict adherence to capacity and lift plans. Owners should require crane lift plans for all critical picks—detailing weight, radius, swing, ground conditions, and qualifications of spotters. Forklift routes must be planned to avoid pedestrian areas and equipment parking. Excavation work must meet OSHA's requirements for sloping, shoring, and shielding—and owners should require regular inspection documentation.

Routine site logistics reviews, incident investigations, and updates to the traffic management plan help prevent collisions and keep the project on track. Owners should visibly support Stop Work Authority—empowering anyone to halt operations if risks are observed—demonstrating that safety always comes before schedule or cost savings.



Chapter 8: Special Safety Concerns—Occupied Facilities

Working in occupied hotels, hospitals, schools, warehouses, or office buildings presents additional challenges. Owners must ensure contractors plan for public and occupant protection, maintaining safe separation from construction activities. Dust, noise, and vibration controls must receive the same attention as physical hazards. Require contractors to provide infection control procedures, access restriction plans, and detailed schedules indicating high-impact tasks.

Owners should coordinate closely with facility management to schedule disruptive work, minimize downtime, and implement visitor communication protocols. Protecting business operations and public safety is not just a project concern, but a long-term reputation issue for every owner and developer.



Key Safety Steps in Occupied Facilities



Infection/Dust Control

Seal work zones, use HEPA filters and negative air machines. Coordinate cleaning and monitor air quality diligently.



Noise & Access Planning

Schedule noisy or disruptive work during off-hours. Clearly separate pedestrian paths and restrict access to all active zones.



Continuous Communication

Notify facility staff and tenants of work impacts and emergency plans. Prepare signage, bulletins, and response procedures in advance.

Chapter 9:

Construction Site

Housekeeping

Essentials

A clean, well-organized jobsite is an inherently safer site. Owners should insist on daily housekeeping protocols to minimize trip hazards, manage materials storage, and control accumulations of waste. Clearly designated areas for equipment, trash, and flammable materials prevent fire risks and make emergency egress routes accessible. Contracts should specify intervals for trash removal, sweeping, and replenishing spill kits or fire extinguishers. Owners who set clear housekeeping standards, monitor performance, and take prompt corrective action help prevent the most common injuries: slips, trips, falls, and fires. Encourage open reporting of housekeeping issues—by both contractors and field staff—to promote a site-wide culture of order and safety.

Best Practices: Storage, Waste & Fire Prevention

Require materials to be stacked securely, keeping walking paths and emergency exits clear at all times. Flammable liquids must be stored in rated cabinets away from ignition sources. Waste management plans should include frequent pickup schedules and bin locations, as well as procedures for hazardous materials. Owners should require contractors to demonstrate fire protection measures—such as extinguishers, hot work permits, and restricted smoking areas—before each phase. A strong emphasis on orderliness reduces both risk and rework, delivering a safer and more productive project.

Chapter 10: Safety Documentation, Reporting & Continuous Improvement

Owners must ensure all contractors document daily safety activities—site walks, toolbox talks, inspections, and incident investigations. These records establish a baseline for compliance, help identify trends, and facilitate root-cause analysis when incidents occur.

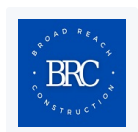
Require routine submission of safety reports and review logs regularly alongside project progress. Owners who engage proactively in review meetings build trust with their teams and position safety as a visible priority.

Continuous improvement is driven by lessons learned and corrective actions. Encourage reporting and transparent discussion of incidents, close calls, and improvement opportunities. Use these insights to update site procedures, retrain teams, or modify project logistics. Owners who make reporting easy and non-punitive drive steady improvement in site-wide safety performance.

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**Every accident is a message.
The best owners listen, learn,
and improve.**

Safety Director, ENR Top 100 Contractor



Chapter 11: OSHA Compliance Basics

Maintaining OSHA compliance is a shared responsibility. Owners influence compliance through contractor selection, site policies, and oversight. Owner responsibilities include providing safe site access, demanding up-to-date OSHA 300 logs, and verifying that required documentation is in place. Owners should ask that contractors submit site-specific safety plans, permits and inspections, hazard assessments, and records of all required staff training.

Common violations that can affect owners include lack of fall protection, unsafe scaffolds, electrical hazards, and inadequate housekeeping. A strong compliance culture starts with clear owner expectations for reporting and corrective action. By requesting routine compliance reviews, owners can spot problems early—before agencies or claims force a reactive response.

Owner and Contractor Responsibilities: Documentation

Owners should require that all contractors maintain and submit: experience modification rate (EMR) documentation, OSHA 300 logs, worker training records, permits for high-risk work (like hot work or excavation), inspection logs, and all incident/near-miss reports. Clear, up-to-date documentation isn't just a legal safeguard; it drives transparency, accountability, and continual improvement. Owners who audit documentation see higher overall site compliance and a reduction in serious incidents and penalties.

Chapter 12:

Emergency Response Planning

Emergencies in construction may include medical events, fires, severe weather, utility strikes, and hazardous material spills. Owners should require comprehensive response plans that are site-specific, communicated early, and practiced via drills. The plan must designate evacuation routes, assembly points, and communication steps. Make sure all emergency contacts are posted clearly and every worker knows how to reach site medical resources and trigger alarms.

Owners should schedule regular emergency drills, involve facility management, and consider scenarios unique to the site (e.g., high-rise rescue, school lockdowns, or hospital code blue). The goal is to minimize confusion, injuries, and downtime—protecting both the project and everyone who visits or works on the property.

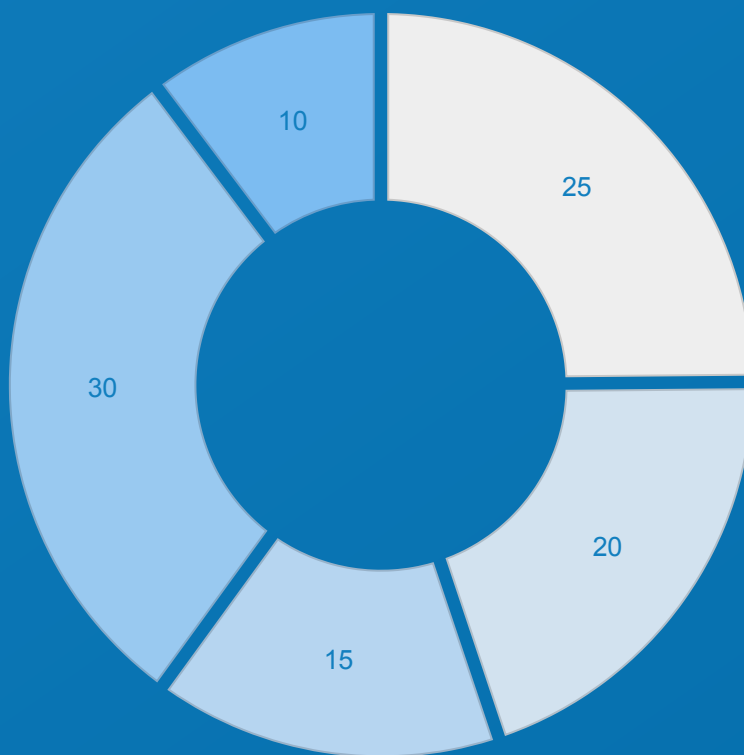
Chapter 13: Safety Technology in Modern Construction

New technologies are transforming construction safety. Owners can now require contractors to use mobile safety software for daily reports, wearable sensors to detect falls or fatigue, drones for difficult inspections, and digital systems for documentation and compliance tracking. These tools boost visibility, speed up response, and help catch hazards before they become incidents.

Adopting technology-driven approaches may increase initial cost, but the payback is clear—faster hazard identification, automated reminders for required inspections, and comprehensive data that supports continuous improvement. Owners who champion innovation are rewarded with safer jobsites and more transparent, accountable contractors.

Chapter 14: Measuring Safety Performance

Key Metrics for Measuring Construction Safety Performance



- Experience Modification Rate (EMR) (25)
- Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR) (20)
- Near-Miss Reports (15)
- Leading Indicators (training, observation, etc.) (30)
- Lagging Indicators (incidents) (10)

Commonly used indicators for jobsite safety: EMR, TRIR, near-miss reports, leading/lagging metrics. Owners should use these to benchmark contractor performance.

Chapter 15: How Construction Management Improves Safety Outcomes

A capable construction management (CM) firm can be an owner's best ally for project safety. CM teams coordinate multiple trades, oversee daily site conditions, and facilitate proactive communication between all parties. Their expertise in scheduling, logistics, and risk reduction streamlines operations and increases compliance. Owners who engage experienced construction managers benefit from continuous oversight and prompt resolution of safety issues as they arise.

Daily involvement by the CM keeps all trades focused on safe practices, while access to real-time safety data helps them address emerging hazards quickly. Construction managers can also facilitate lessons-learned briefings at project milestones, sharing best practices and incident root causes with owners and teams alike. This collaborative, feedback-driven approach ensures that every project builds on the safety successes (and hard-won lessons) of those that came before.

