

SAFETY SHOOTER

Project Safety Building in Airport Parking Garage

by guest author Jim Mahoney

Constructing a large parking garage in the middle of a working airport with thousands of passengers flying in and out every day is a challenging task. Keeping workers safe is always a priority on construction sites as is keeping the public safe. Working in close proximity to airline terminals, aircrafts, and public roadways presents a whole new set of safety challenges.

Working on a busy airport ramp with constant aircraft movement creates a difficult environment for safety. Airline

workers must follow strict safety rules to ensure passenger and worker safety and prevent costly aircraft damage. The cost of aircraft damage goes far beyond the cost of repairing the physical damage to the aircraft. An aircraft on the ground for several days or weeks will cost millions of dollars in lost revenue due to flight cancellations. An aircraft makes many flights each day. Some of the cardinal rules that airline workers follow every day are testing the brakes on equipment prior to each use and making 50 and 8 ft (15 and 2 m) stops prior to approaching a parked aircraft. One of the rules any airport worker learns prior to driving on the airport is “aircraft always have the right of way.”

One of the biggest challenges in building the parking garage is space or lack thereof. The footprint of the parking garage is basically the only space available for all of the trades involved in the project to use. Every square foot is being excavated, graded, poured, erected, and used for loading and unloading of trucks, material storage, and roadways. As the project progresses, the use of an area is constantly changing. It takes quite a bit of preplanning to orchestrate the daily movements and activities. For each activity taking place, whether it be unloading truckloads of steel with a crane; planning access and exit routes for hundreds of concrete trucks; or entering the site for a large footing pour, each must be carefully planned and examined to ensure a safe, smooth flow of activities.

Safety in large construction projects takes teamwork from all the companies and workers involved. Any weak link in the



Large wall pile cap (1683 yd [1500 m] of concrete)



Pumping concrete on airport bridge



Shear wall forms

chain of safety could, at any time, affect anyone working on the project regardless of his or her role. The general contractor leads the way but the smallest subcontractor is just as important when it comes to safety. Safety begins with each individual company, from the head of the company to the new employee undergoing orientation. To build a safety culture there are no shortcuts. Companies serious about safety must invest the time and resources—lip service doesn't pay dividends. Safety is not a canned speech heard your first day on the job and soon forgotten. It is an ongoing process. The process consists of training on how to perform tasks, use tools, and be aware of your surroundings for unsafe situations.

Beyond safety training, try to keep safety on the minds of our workers on a daily basis. This is accomplished beginning with a daily pretask meeting. Prior to beginning work, the day's activities and their related hazards are discussed. This is also a time for each worker to have the opportunity to discuss any issues and ask questions. It is a simple way to keep the lines of communication open and show workers that safety is the first order of business taken care of each day.

Once the work day begins, safety walks are conducted several times a day to look for hazards. It's a good time to reinforce good safety practices as well. Checklists are another

tool to use to keep focused on safety. For example, prior to working on scaffolds during a wall concrete pour, a safety coordinator or foreman examines the scaffold using our checklist to make sure it complies with California Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) safety regulations. We have invited vendors to the work site to provide a fire extinguisher class where each worker could use a fire extinguisher to put out a real fire. Anything you can do to teach and communicate safety helps reinforce a safety culture.

Dollars spent on safety pay dividends in unexpected ways. Statistics show every dollar spent on safety is worth five dollars in future cost reductions. With the importance of safety today being bigger than ever, companies with good safety records are considered for more jobs. More importantly, workers benefit from a safety culture that has their best interests in mind.



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Terminal building emergency exit stairs



Wall pile cap before concrete placement