

Safety News

COMPETENT PERSONS

Definition:

Competent Person: OSHA requires the employer to have a “Competent Person” perform a myriad of safety-related duties on construction jobsites. Some typical duties are as follows.

- Regular and frequent safety inspections of the jobsite
- Safety walk-around inspections of equipment, scaffolds, ladders, guardrails, etc.
- Determination of what forms of worker protective systems to employ for the work performed
- Start of shift, and when conditions change on excavation work

And so on... in other words a *Competent Person is needed throughout a project's duration.*

What does it take to be a “Competent Person?”

All workers should take the OSHA Construction Safety & Health course. This should be supplemented with a refresher course in each of the other two years. As a general rule, if your work involves scaffolds, you need to train all affected workers in scaffolds training with certification. If you work at heights over six feet (7 ½ in California) your workers need Fall Protection Training, if you work in excavations, training is required, and so on.

What courses will make my workers “Competent Persons”?

Be aware that there are NO courses that will by themselves “make” one a Competent Person. OSHA simply requires Competent Persons be selected by the Employer. OSHA has no specific criteria for formal training, however a Competent Person’s safety-training background may be reviewed by OSHA when assessing the validity of your choice for Competent Person. OSHA may, of course, also review the training records of any and all workers in your company during an inspection.

Can a Competent Person have other duties?

Yes, in most cases, the safety duties of the Competent Person are in addition to the worker’s normal duties on the jobsite (*as foreman, etc.*). However, on some larger projects, a Competent Person is a full time job.

Who can be a Competent Person?

The employer should select the person based on the following criteria. The Competent Person shall have:

- Experience in the craft or type of work being performed. For instance, an apprentice or office worker cannot by OSHA’s definition be considered a Competent Person.
- Knowledge of the general safety hazards likely to be present or encountered during performance of the work. For instance, this knowledge can be based on experience and formal training in OSHA regulations.
- Knowledge of the specific hazards likely to be present or encountered during performance of the work. This knowledge will usually be based on experience and training on your particular equipment, tools, process, or type of work.
- Authority from the Employer (Contractor). This authority should be sincere and complete. The Competent Person should have the authority to provide a safe workplace, correct unsafe conditions, remove workers or subs who are unsafe, etc.

Does OSHA look for a Competent Person on a jobsite?

Absolutely! In fact, lack of a Competent Person on a jobsite is one of the most cited violations on construction sites. The first question an inspector usually asks will be, “Who’s the Competent Person?”. Which brings up an important point. Tell your workers onsite who your Competent Person is, and tell your General Contractor or subs onsite.