

Is Your Training 'All Greek' to Your Non-English Speakers?

BLR Safety Training Tips editor says that in order for your safety training to be effective, you need to have clear communication with trainees.

That's an obvious goal, but it may be hard to achieve with workers who speak English as a second language (ESL). However, OSHA says that an employer's responsibility to provide employees with information and training about safety and health hazards doesn't go away because an employee can't understand standard English-language training programs. When that is the case, employers must inform and train these workers in a language they can understand.

Although Spanish is the most common second language spoken in the United States, there are many other languages ESL workers might speak including:

- Chinese
- Arabic
- Vietnamese and Cambodian
- Various African languages
- Portuguese
- French

Take these steps to make sure your training message is understood by ESL workers:

- Speak slowly, explain fully, and repeat important points several times.
- Choose the simplest words and avoid technical jargon. If you must use technical terms, explain them in simple terms.
- Use a translator, if appropriate.
- Demonstrate while you speak and use visual aids, such as pictures and props, to supplement your words.
- Encourage participation. Be patient and help employees express their thoughts and questions.
- Have employees practice new skills during the training session so that you can see if they've understood.
- Use feedback to confirm comprehension. Allow extra time for questions.
- Provide handouts in the language(s) trainees speak and read.
- Follow up on the job to make sure that employees correctly apply what they learned.

The language barrier may be only part of the problem when training ESL workers.

Cultural differences can also affect communication. In many foreign cultures, for example, older people are treated with great respect and deference, whereas in the more casual American culture, older people might be treated with more familiarity. Older Hispanic workers might be offended if they are addressed by their first name and prefer to be called "Señor" or "Señora."

Why It Matters...

- * The Hispanic labor force will make up more than 15 percent of the U.S. workforce and 25 percent of the U.S. population by 2050.
- * Workplace fatalities among Hispanic workers have risen almost 35 percent in the last decade.
- * Immigration is on the rise and makes the U.S. workforce more diverse than ever

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