

# Contractor differentiates itself through safety

CEO: Planning for safety helps projects run more efficiently



*Elk River, Minnesota-based U.S. SiteWork specializes in earthwork, excavation, underground utility construction, drilled piers/deep foundations, and demolition for large projects such*

Bart Anderson

*as industrial oil and gas sites, agricultural terminals, tank farms and railroad embankments. The organization was founded in 2012 by five seasoned professionals, and places a major focus on safety. We talked with CEO Bart Anderson about why safety is so important to the organization. (Conversation edited for length and clarity.)*



## **You've stated that your primary mission as a company is safety. How did you arrive at that philosophy?**

The safety focus of the industry has changed a lot in the last 15 or 20 years. In my past experience, even though my previous company had a great focus on safety, there were still guys in the field that hadn't quite bought into the new safety culture that was coming from the top. It was a challenge over there, and I thought that we're going to start this company and we're going to put safety culture at the forefront of everything we do. Everybody we hire, we're going to try to get the safety culture right in the beginning, and if the people we're hiring don't have the right mindset toward safety and dedication to it, then we don't really want them working here. The five people that started this company, we didn't start it to get people hurt. We started it to do it different, to try and do it better, and to set ourselves apart, and safety is one of those ways we try to set our company apart from the competition.

## **How do you hire for safety?**

We'll ask them some certain questions about their experience. Have they put a job hazard analysis together? What did they think of the safety culture at the previous company they worked at? Do they think it could be better and what would they change? Asking about five to eight questions like that, you can get a good feel for

what kind of safety aptitude that certain individual has.

## **We've heard the strong economy is making it tough to find good employees. How do you find employees without lowering your standards?**

It's not a perfect process, but 99 percent of our employees get it. They understand the safety focus. They understand the dedication that we want all our crews to have every day. If we get new hires, we have a mentoring process where our experienced employees will work with them very closely. We watch them very closely the first two to three weeks they work here to see if they actually practice what they are preaching.

## **What are the practical things you do to keep workers safe?**

We do safety training frequently throughout the year internally with our supervisors and our foremen. We try to get each one of them trained to a level where we could consider them a full-fledged safety director. From there you have to get every single person buying into zero injuries every day. The way we try to accomplish that is with a good, thorough job hazard analysis (JHA) every morning, and before every task. If we switch tasks throughout the day, we might do two or three JHAs. Each task is different, the job site changes as the day goes on, and we want to make sure

we've analyzed all the hazards on the job site correctly so we can put in the proper mitigation techniques and methods to properly manage all those hazards.

## **Do you look at your safety program in terms of return on investment?**

I think that's kind of a gray area. It's hard to calculate that. Some people have the mindset that all these safety measures cost production and cost contractors money, and I completely disagree with that. I think the safer you are and the more planned out your jobs are, the better they will run and the more production that you will get, and safety is a huge part of that. A better plan and better executed project should also be a safer project.

## **What's your advice for other business leaders who want to make their workplaces safer?**

If you're going to walk the talk, you have to become educated in what makes a great safety culture and what will facilitate great safety performance. I read a ton of articles. I've been to a ton of seminars. I've been fortunate to work for some really great, safe companies that have taught me a lot. The industry and the clients that I've had over my career have driven me to try to be a safety expert. I don't feel that I'm a safety expert, but I work hard to try to make myself more knowledgeable about safety and more savvy about safety every day. ■