

PROFILE

Empire Masonry Ltd.

Langley, BC

A common sense approach to safety

Rob Marwood has been in the masonry business most of his life, so he knows the importance of working safely on building sites. The basis of his whole approach to workplace safety is organization and common sense.

Empire Masonry Ltd., the 15-employee company owned and operated by Marwood for more than five years, does brick, block, concrete, masonry brick veneer and stone work for commercial contractors. They have an enviable workplace safety record — they have never had a serious fall or injury.

Their safety record hasn't happened by accident. "When it comes to safety, the biggest factor is common sense," says Marwood. "Most accidents happen because someone makes a mistake, and most mistakes happen because of lack of experience." To Marwood, common sense and experience go hand in hand. He credits his company's excellent safety record to his policy of keeping experienced work crews together. He does whatever he can to reduce turnover, and pairs new employees with more experienced workers who know what to do and what to look for in terms of safety.



An organized approach to safety is considered critical. "Safety takes a level of organization that should be part of any small business. The organized companies are the ones making money," he surmises. "If you're organized in safety, you're probably organized in other areas too."

Marwood spends most of his time in the field on job sites, and builds safety into every step of a project. He assesses the site and figures out what equipment or safety features his crew will need. Masonry work requires a wide variety of personal safety equipment. Cutting masonry requires hearing and eye protection, and when dry cutting (without wetting the stone) an appropriate respirator is also needed. Some jobs are done on scaffolding, and require fall protection. When there is a site-specific hazard, Marwood draws up a work plan for that particular area.

To ensure that all his employees have the appropriate personal safety gear, Marwood keeps a supply available on site. "Some people think you can cut costs by not providing safety equipment, but it costs more in the long run if you end up with an injured worker. And in terms of the bottom line, personal safety gear isn't a big item — I don't see any excuse for not having it."

For Marwood, safety is more than just a day-to-day concern. He has worked with his professional association and the WCB on the issue of falls from scaffolding, and invested a significant amount to bring his scaffolding up to the standard required by the 1999 OH&S regulation.

Although he considers safety everyone's responsibility, Marwood takes his personal responsibility very seriously. "If someone were badly hurt on my site, I'd have a hard time dealing with it. Anything the WCB would do would be nothing compared to what I'd put myself through."

For more information please contact the Small Business Service Centre at:

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