

Entrenching safety along the line

Workers responsible for the Cambie cut and cover portion of the Canada Line project know safety is part of the job. With an evolving workplace dug down in the middle of a busy road, Cambie Street Constructors understands that young workers deserve extra attention and training.

Project safety manager Doug Fielding knows from experience. “My first day on the job as a young worker, I nearly lost my hand,” he says.

Older and wiser, Fielding is now responsible for worker health and safety along one of Vancouver’s most prominent construction sites. Remembering the close call he had in his youth, he has also implemented a program to teach young workers about workplace hazards.

“We are not born with safety awareness,” Fielding says. “You have to learn it.”

Young workers begin their education with a general orientation that all new workers receive. Afterwards, they complete eight hours of additional training that teaches them how to identify and control hazards and also learn the “12 elements of safety” through an interactive computer program.

Once young workers have successfully completed their additional training, they partner with a mentor. As a senior member of the construction crew, the mentor will provide the young worker with individual support and training for the next two weeks.

The mentor will also encourage questions and gauge the young worker’s comfort level and ability to do the job safely. After a few weeks, the mentor will evaluate the young worker based on personal observations and co-worker comments.

"Much of the program is a one-on-one communication exchange that includes visual aids and a feedback system," says Fielding. "Educating young workers enough so that they realize that additional tools, equipment, and procedures are required."

For the remainder of their probation period, young workers wear a green hard hat. Rather than the usual white, the green hat:

- identifies the person as a young worker and new to the workplace
- invites co-workers to provide guidance and support
- advises others to alert young workers of any hazards or unsafe practices that may not be immediately recognized

After a month on the job, young workers are eligible to graduate to a white hard hat. Acquiring the new colour is an accomplishment and the final stage of Cambie Street Constructors' young worker program. For those at the worksite, the white hat indicates a person has a good level of confidence and ability, and also an understanding of how to remain safe on the job.

By rewarding safe practices, Cambie Street Constructors' young worker program makes it clear that safety is a priority.

"People do what's important to their boss," says Fielding. "Make safety important. Make the time, be organized, and continuously improve. Ensure everyone is accountable for safety. It's just good business."