

SAFETY FIRST

WITH TAMMY K. CLARK



Construction Headaches: Subs of Subs of Subs (Part 1B)

In March, I introduced this new series, *Construction Headaches*, in which I will offer insight and solutions to some of the most frustrating issues on today's construction projects. If you haven't yet, you may want to read Part 1A of this column in the [March Newsletter](#) before continuing.

This first column in the series is all about dealing with 2nd and 3rd tier subcontractors. Part 1A uncovered the reasons why this has become such an issue in recent years, so we're now ready to look at how we can focus our efforts on overcoming this very real and very frustrating problem.

The most important aspect in managing our subs' subs is proactive communication. Holding a pre-construction kickoff meeting with all subcontractors (or at the least a pre-start meeting with the smaller groups of subs that typically begin their work onsite about the same time) is crucial for setting the tone of the project, reviewing safety requirements, enforcement policies, and expectations, and addressing potential issues such as 2nd and 3rd tier subs on the project. It's critical to recognize that your subs may be hiring subs of their own so you can have a plan in place *before* construction begins.

The contract for the project is held between the controlling contractor and the individual subcontractors, not 2nd and 3rd tier subcontractors. It is the job of the controlling contractor to clearly communicate all expectations to their subs. They must be made aware of all site rules and safety requirements, *pre-construction*, and be reminded that if they are utilizing their own subcontract labor, it is then *their* job to clearly communicate the site rules, safety requirements, and enforcement policies on down the line.

The controlling contractor must also communicate to their subs that any noncompliance onsite will be considered *their* noncompliance, as the contract holds the 1st tier subs accountable for complying with all requirements. Encourage them to hold their own meeting with their subs to communicate the

information and the requirements to those who will be onsite actually performing the work. They must hold their own subs accountable.

The second aspect of dealing with this issue effectively is enforcement. The controlling contractor must have a solid enforcement policy in place for dealing with noncompliance on their projects, and they must consistently use it! The company policies must be stated in the contract documents, but it is not enough to leave it at that and assume the subs will read it on their own and comply—the enforcement policy must be clearly communicated during the pre-construction meetings. I hear many project managers state, "Well, that's all stated in our contract, so they should know". Yet these same companies are struggling with noncompliance on their projects because of their subs' subs. The controlling contractor must take the additional steps of holding pre-construction meetings to communicate these requirements in person if they want to resolve this issue.

There is one additional, and very important aspect to solving the problems associated with subs of subs, and we will wrap up this article with that topic next month! Stay tuned!



Tammy K. Clark is a construction industry Safety & Quality Consultant with over 20 years experience as a business owner, consultant, educator, and speaker. Tammy has worked with renowned clients nationwide. She is a member of ASSE, former Chair for the NAWIC National Safety & Health Awareness Committee, and was nominated as one of the Grand Rapids Business Journal's 50 Most Influential Women. You can contact Tammy at tammy@tammykclark.com.

