

IWIF SAFETY Recommendations for Employers of Hispanic Workers



1. Recruit a bilingual employee (preferably a foreman or supervisor) to translate safety messages to workers.

The most important recommendation IWIF can suggest is that employers seek out a bilingual employee, preferably a foreman or supervisor or another person in a key safety position, to work with and supervise non-English speaking individuals in the field. A bilingual supervisor can translate safety instructions, signage and training manuals in employees' native language.

Seek out a good employee who speaks both Spanish and English. Preferably, this employee will get along well with the rest of the crew and has proven his or her ability to be responsible and reliable. This person should also be aware of the dynamics between the various different Latin American cultures and be able to encourage teamwork among all workers.

If you cannot promote from within, look to hire a bilingual foreman or supervisor. But be careful here; some say that bringing in a translator from the outside doesn't always work. Translators might fail to convey the nuances of your trade's particular terminology and safety and health hazards. Be sure to hire someone with experience in your particular field or trade.

2. Use more pictures and fewer words.

Use more symbols and fewer words to describe hazards. Some foreign-born Hispanic workers don't necessarily read and write in their own language. Many employers are moving toward using pictorial signage to help warn of dangerous or unsafe equipment or conditions, or when safety equipment is required. Check catalogues from national distributors of safety equipment for literature and signs, especially in Spanish.

3. Offer trade-related safety training in Spanish.

Contractors can take advantage of bilingual resources provided by OSHA, ABC chapters, the Chesapeake Safety Council, or other local construction or trade organizations for help in locating safety training in Spanish.

It is important, however, to supplement such training methods with person-to-person contact on the jobsite. Personal instruction can help to reiterate – in Spanish – the verbal training and demonstrations of safe work practices.

Remember to consider education levels when planning your safety training; keep it basic. Contractors agree that when craft training and safety training go hand-in-hand, companies can establish a level of trust with Hispanic employees – lowering injury rates.

4. Provide PPEs and safety equipment.

Some Hispanic workers cannot afford to purchase their own safety equipment. What better way to reinforce your safety requirements, build trust, and show you care than by purchasing and providing approved personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety equipment for your Hispanic workers.

5. Learn the Spanish language & culture.

Supervisors, foremen, and company management should learn basic, conversational Spanish just as they expect their workers to learn English. Many Spanish language classes also delve into Latino cultures as well, so you may learn more than you expect!

6. Send your Hispanic employees to English classes.

Encourage your employees to develop and improve their English language skills. English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes are being taught virtually everywhere nowadays. Your local high school or community college is a good place to begin. See our article entitled "Spanish Resources in Maryland" for further contact information.

Hispanic employees tend to notice when their company owners put an effort into bilingual training and assistance. As a result, they are more inclined to comply or cooperate with company rules – including safety standards.

7. Reward safe behavior.

Reward safe behaviors among all your employees. Setting up a reward system and rewarding good behaviors when workers reach certain safety goals can be very effective. Be creative in your choice of rewards; they don't all have to be monetary. Public recognition or a celebration meal both work very well. ■