

New outlook, same message

Despite a fluctuating economy, safety, training and contract management remain as essential as ever.

According to a number of expert sources, including the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, the close-to-record-setting economic growth that the country has been experiencing for the last 100-plus months – which is the second-longest period of economic expansion in the nation's history – appears to be poised for a slowdown and plateau.

AEM wrote back in May that they don't feel there's reason to believe the ag and construction sectors will experience a downturn in the coming months, but they do agree with The American Institute of Architects Chief Economist Kermit Baker, Hon. AIA, PhD, who said that even though the economy has been performing very well recently, "trends in business confidence scores are red flags that suggest a slowdown is likely for 2020. These signals may be temporary responses to negative short-term conditions, but historically they have preceded a more widespread downturn."

Invest in safety/training

Last October, in an article similar to this one, we discussed what it meant from a safety standpoint to be in the midst of a busier construction season while having more people working on a job site. Our advice was simple: spend more time thinking about safety and risk management and make intentional decisions to invest in training.

The reality of the American economy is that it's going to fluctuate. We'll have upticks and downturns and plateaus, which means construction work will be

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busier or slower or stay the same. But regardless of what the economic forecast is, and regardless of what the economic reality is, the message that you'll hear from us here at NBIS won't change: strive to be safer; adequately train your employees; be aware of the language in the contracts you're signing.

A month ago, Billy Smith published a column in this magazine called "Three Thoughts On Risk Management for Q3." In it, he unpacked three different topics, two of which I'm going to reiterate here.

Avoid a contract crisis

Perhaps you think you've heard it all before. Perhaps you think your contracts are ironclad. Perhaps you even think you're exempt from having to think about this. No matter how you approach the issue of contracts, they're one of the most important topics to think about when it comes to protecting your business. Laws are changing. Lawyers are everywhere. And there's substantial risk in having the wrong language in your invoice, job or rental ticket and lease agreement. The right language can help you transfer liability to the appropriate party while making sure you're reimbursed for any expenses you incur. Avoid a contract crisis by making sure a team of trained professionals is providing you with the appropriate state-specific language.

Use downtime to train

There's never a wrong time to implement training, and you can never do too much of it. Properly training employees is a key element in reducing accidents and exposure to risk. It's also one of the primary ways you can positively affect your insurance loss history, which, in turn, is one of the primary ways you can save money during your insurance renewal.

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“OSHA requires that training be conducted, documented and continuous. Many times, companies are so busy working that training is done much too briefly – in a tool box talk most of the time – and seldom done in a more formal setting. Sometimes, companies skip it altogether. Other companies don't invest in training because they feel like it's not worth the financial risk since employees may ultimately choose to leave.”

At NBIS, we know that any company that doesn't invest in training because they feel like it's too much financial risk is likely going to be a company with losses attached to their name. It's certainly not the only factor, but many of the injuries and near-misses that occur on jobsites could be prevented if only the company would have invested in more – and better – training.

As we move toward the end of the year and into 2020, remember that regardless of what happens with the economic forecast, sticking to the basics of training, reviewing your contracts and investing in safety will always pay dividends. ■



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