

Protect Your Multi-Lingual Workers

by

State Compensation Insurance Fund

Do you know the language of your workforce? Are you getting important safety training messages and workplace communications across to your limited- or non-English speaking workers? From procedures and policies to critical hazard warnings and emergency instructions, make sure the message is understood by all your workers.

Cal/OSHA requires that employers provide safety training to their workers in a language they can understand. Upon employment, assess each worker's verbal and written English understanding. If workers are not English-proficient, instruct in their primary language, provide a translator, or have translated materials. Of you translate or train in another language, cover the same materials and amount of detail was presented in English. Use interactive training to get hands-on experience and provide employees a chance to ask questions.

Communication is key in getting information across to any worker, but a multilingual workforce poses a challenge. If you're instructing non-English-speaking workers, use methods to make sure they understand you. Give clear, simple verbal instructions and list your instructions in the order that you want them done. Ask workers to repeat instructions back to you. Ask them to demonstrate the technique they've been taught. If the job requires technical terms teach workers what the words mean.

Safety directions and hazard signs need pictures and words that all workers can understand. And, employers and supervisors should confirm that every worker understands them. If the safety and hazard signs contain only words, translate them in the primary language of your workforce to ensure everyone gets the message.

Workplace documents that must be translated include hazard warning signs, lockout-tagout devices and signs, company safety policies and procedures, equipment manuals, and instruction booklets. Provide material safety data sheets (MSDS) in appropriate languages so your workers know how to properly handle, store, and dispose of chemicals. When you have materials translated, ask a bilingual reader to review them for mistakes.

Workers should understand the hazards and safety procedures of their particular work location or process. Explain emergency procedures, contact phone numbers, and warning words such as, "fire," "danger," and "look out!" Identify bilingual workers that can serve as interpreters on the job site, during training or act as resources for reviewing written materials. Make sure workers know who is bilingual on the site. If you're not sure whether a worker understands the safety or hazard communication, locate the person that can translate for you or the material that can accurately convey the message. ••