



At a Coast Industrial Construction worksite in Prince Rupert, B.C., WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer Rod Saunders (middle) talks safety management systems with blasters Larry Bolton and Sean Praetzel (left) and general manager Finn Conradsen and driller Luke McCarthy (right).

# Mid-sized company empowers workers to think safety first

By Marnie Douglas

From constructing industrial roads and bridges, to working in rock quarries, decommissioning mine sites, and building sub-divisions, Coast Industrial Construction (CIC) works on a variety of potentially dangerous jobsites. Keeping workers safe, no matter what the job, has become a focus for CIC; it's why they've decided to set the highest safety standards possible across the board. While the CEO concedes it's been hard to get here, CIC boasts having the safety standards of an oil and gas company that typically has thousands of employees — CIC has just over fifty.

A sharp-looking mannequin greets visitors outside Coast Industrial Construction's project office in Prince Rupert. Dressed head-to-toe in the required personal

protective equipment, Safety Sam's message is clear — "if you don't look like this, you shouldn't be on the jobsite."

It's one reminder of just how seriously the company takes safety.

"Our employees are our investment. Our workers need to be able to return home safely at the end of every day," says Finn Conradsen, CIC's general manager.

### Strict safety standards

So what does the company's safety management system look like?

Michelle Watson, CIC's health and safety coordinator, says there are many different components. At minimum, internal auditors review documentation annually, and workers from each worksite provide valuable recommendations for updating processes. CIC also works hard to maintain their ISO 9001:2008 accreditation, an international standard for quality management systems. And, because they work in

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—Rod Saunders, WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer

general construction as well as oil and gas projects, CIC applies oil and gas safety standards to each and every project. In its fifth year of operation, CIC has taken its time to meet rigorous safety standards, says Conradsen, but it was always the company’s goal.

“It’s certainly not easy. There’s much more documentation involved and audit requirements, for example. But for us, it was the right thing to do and a requirement if we want to work on large oil and gas projects,” he adds.

With the variety of projects, and differing safety standards depending on the work, the company also didn’t want their employees shifting between one specification and another. That commitment has set CIC apart from its competitors.

“There’s not a lot of companies, if any, in our geographical area that comply with those standards. It’s something that we’re proud of and we work very hard at, establishing a commitment to those higher safety standards and that safety culture,” Conradsen adds.

Rod Saunders, WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer, says the rigorous policies, procedures, and documentation, along with CIC’s commitment to training are not something he sees in smaller companies — generally, it’s something more common with the larger forestry companies and large oil and gas.

“CIC has a very extensive safety program in place and they’re keen to support it in the workplace. It’s hard to build that safety culture at that level, but the key is to build it from day one and from the ground level right to the top. They seem to have done that,” he says.

## **Training excellence**

Their commitment to training starts with making sure new hires get both face-to-face and hands-on training before beginning work. When they meet with Watson for their first safety orientation, she goes over the

procedures with them verbally, asking questions to gauge the worker’s level of understanding. If she gets “vague” answers from the worker, Watson tries a different tack.

“I change my approach in how that information is delivered based on worker’s needs. People learn differently, it isn’t enough to just provide them with paperwork to read and sign; we need to know they understand the standards we set.”

Once on site, daily toolbox meetings ensure they go over any site hazards and any specific issues that might affect the site, such as weather. They also go over any near misses and they change procedures if necessary. At weekly tailgate meetings, employees are encouraged to discuss any incidents or areas of concern. The high



Jeremy Brown of J.B. Gisbudwada Contracting Ltd. is one of four workers supported by CIC in the Rock Truck initiative. He now is an independent contractor who continues to work for CIC.

level of documentation also comes in on the field, as employees complete Field Level Hazard Assessment cards listing tasks, hazards, and mitigations to review before any job starts.

### The rock truck initiative

Another way they have trained and empowered their workers was through their Heavy Equipment Operator Training Program. The first of its kind in Northwest B.C., CIC's rock truck initiative was developed to provide skills training and entrepreneurial opportunity to Gitxaala community members — CIC is 51 percent owned by the Gitxaala First Nation.

In partnership with Community Futures and the Gitxaala Band, CIC worked with workers who showed initiative, leadership, and great work ethic in their Heavy Equipment Operator Training Program. The program not only trained them in safe work practices and made them certified operators, but it also gave them the independence to operate their own contracting businesses.

So far, four members who showed leadership potential have been given assistance to train to become certified operators and to acquire heavy equipment that they then own. CIC then employs them at various worksites.

"It was a great initiative. It allowed them to train and ultimately become owner-operators. We now have a pool of certified contractors," she adds.

### Something to consider every day

Something that Conradsen is especially proud of is the wallet card that he personally hands each new employee. On one side is the company motto and four questions — number one is "Were there any injuries?," followed by "Were there any incidents of equipment or property damage?," "Were there any near misses?," and "Are they fit for duty?."

On the other side of the card are workers' rights, outlining an employee's right to a safe and healthy work environment.

Employees are encouraged to review their wallet card at the end of every day.

"It's that last opportunity to reflect on the day and think back if there's anything they may have forgotten. Even the smallest thing could be important, and something that might be missed when you're immersed in your work. It's just another last line of defence," he says. ☺

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