Communication toolbox talk for bilingual crews

29 CFR 1910.30, 1910.1200, 1910.145, 1926.1421, 1926.1417, 1926.21

Date _____ Trainer _____ Location _____

Opening question

If you shouted a warning right now, would every person on this crew understand it in time to move?

Why it matters

A lot of the safety on a job depends on messages getting through: the morning plan, a shouted warning, a hand signal to an operator, a tag on a switch, a label on a drum. On a crew that speaks more than one language, any of those messages can get lost without anyone noticing. A nod does not always mean someone understood. Clear communication is a safety control, just like a guard or a harness.

Key points

1. **Train in a way people understand**
   OSHA's general industry rules for walking-working surfaces put it plainly: the employer must provide information and training to each employee in a manner the employee understands. If a talk is only in English and part of the crew mostly speaks Spanish, the talk did not do its job. Use both languages, short words and pictures, and show the task instead of only describing it.
   29 CFR 1910.30(d)

2. **Check for understanding, not nods**
   Do not ask "Does everyone understand?" and take silence as a yes. Ask people to say the plan back in their own words, or to show you the step. For important messages, use three-way communication: you say it, the other person repeats it back, and you confirm it or correct it. If you do not understand something, say so, and nobody on this crew should give you a hard time for asking.

3. **Labels and safety data sheets**
   Chemical labels in the workplace must be legible, in English, and prominently displayed on the container or readily available in the work area. Employers with employees who speak other languages may add the information in their language, as long as it is also presented in English. If you cannot read a label or a safety data sheet, ask before you use the product, not after.
   29 CFR 1910.1200(f)(10)

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4 **Tags only work if you can read them**

A tag on a valve, switch or piece of equipment is there to stop you before you get hurt. In general industry, the signal word and main message on an accident prevention tag must be understandable to all employees who may be exposed to the hazard. If you find a tag you cannot read, leave the equipment alone and ask before you touch it.

29 CFR 1910.145(f)(4)(iv)

5 **Agree on signals before the work starts**

Hand signals and radio calls only work if everyone means the same thing. On crane work, the operator, signal person and lift director (if there is one) must be able to effectively communicate in the language used. For any equipment, agree on the signals with the operator before work starts, and do not switch to new ones partway through the job.

29 CFR 1926.1421(c)

6 **Anyone can call stop**

Pick one stop word and one stop hand signal that the whole crew knows in both languages, like "Stop" and "Alto," and practice them. On crane work, the operator must obey a stop or emergency stop signal, no matter who gives it. Make it the crew's habit on every job: when anyone calls stop, everyone freezes until it is clear.

29 CFR 1926.1417(y)

Scenario

Picture this: A crew is pouring a slab. At the start of the shift, the foreman runs through the plan fast, in English only, and two new laborers who mostly speak Spanish nod along. Later, the pump operator starts to swing the boom and someone shouts a warning in English. One of the new laborers keeps working right under the boom. Nobody had taught him the stop word or checked that he understood the plan. What should have happened at the start of the shift?

Crew discussion

1. What is our stop word and stop signal, and does everyone here know it in English and Spanish?
2. How can we check that someone understood the plan, not just nodded?
3. Which labels, signs or tags on this job are hard for some of us to read?
4. Who on this crew can help translate, and what do we do when that person is not here?

Bottom line **Say it simply, in a language each person understands, have them say it back, and make sure everyone knows the stop signal.**

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Sign-in sheet / Hoja de asistencia

Topic / Tema: Safety communication on mixed-language crews / Comunicación de seguridad en cuadrillas bilingües

Date / Fecha: _____

Trainer / Instructor: _____ Location / Lugar: _____ Company / Empresa: _____

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