



Berkshire Hathaway donates 333 lbs. of oatmeal Page 2

THE Mecklenburg TIMES

Constructive data
Building permits awarded in Mecklenburg County

Current 12-month period

18,495 ▲ 8.1%

Value: **\$2.777B** ▲ 0.15%

Previous 12-month period **17,116**

Value: **\$2.773B**

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Safety on the job

AGC and DOL look to ramp up construction safety efforts
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“DEMAND FOR HOMES ACROSS THE REGION CONTINUES TO BE STRONG; HOWEVER INVENTORY REMAINS CHALLENGED.”

Maren Brisson-Kuester, president of the Charlotte Regional Realtor Association, on the organization's January report.

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AGC and DOL look to ramp up construction safety efforts

BY ERIC DINKINS

A state contractors' group is taking action to better educate construction workers about safety on the job in response to an increased number of construction deaths in 2014.

There were 19 construction fatalities in North Carolina last year, which accounted for 43 percent of all workplace fatalities, and there were 12 more construction fatalities in 2014 than in 2013.

"We are working every day to offer the training needed to avoid these tragedies and we will be ramping up efforts in light of the latest numbers," said Dave Simpson, interim president and CEO of Carolinas Associated General Contractors, in a statement.

Counties in the Charlotte region accounted for more construction worker fatalities in 2014 than any other part of the state, according to preliminary data recently released by the N.C. Department of Labor.

Mecklenburg, Union, Lincoln and Cleveland counties combined for seven construction fatalities. Two of the fatalities were in Mecklenburg County; three were in Union County, and Lincoln and Cleveland counties each had one construction fatality.

New workers, more work

N.C. Department of Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry said two possible explanations were increases in both the number of inexperienced workers and the amount of construction work being done.

"Whether the workers are new to the industry or returning after the lull in construction that began in 2007, the workers need training or refresher training before starting the job, training that we provide at no cost to the employer," she said in a statement.

Although the number of total workplace fatalities in 2014 was nearly double the number of fatalities in 2013 – 44 compared with 23 – the number

of fatalities that occurred in 2013 was unusually low. 2013 had the lowest number of workplace fatalities in at least 10 years, and 2005 had the most workplace fatalities during that same time period with 68.

The Department of Labor reported that the majority of workplace injuries occur from improper training, failure to recognize hazards and workers' inability to execute proper responses to remain safe around hazards.

To better prepare construction workers, Carolinas AGC plans to add more industry-specific training, and lower the cost of its training programs.

"Safety is the number one priority," said Bill Stricker, CAGC vice president of professional development, in a statement.

In an interview, he said CAGC would focus on changing workers' safety behavior this year, because although it's important that workers receive training, it doesn't matter if they don't apply the training.

For example, he said, "If you're just going to make one quick cut, it's easy not to put those safety glasses on."

More training offered

Carolinas AGC is offering all of its courses at the same price for members and nonmembers this year for the first time. Stricker said CAGC had offered some specific courses in past years, such as trenching and excavations, at a lower price for members.

The association will offer its work-zone traffic control training course for free this year, another first for the association.

The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Division is also stepping up its game by targeting Hispanic construction workers and by focusing on the most common causes of construction fatalities: falls and struck-bys.

"We've been seeing a lot of struck-bys, so we're going to start populating our (training) calendar with struck-bys," said Wanda Lagoe, the OSH

Division's education, training and technical assistance bureau chief.

Falls and struck-bys, two of the four leading causes of construction-related accidents, accounted for 15 of the 18 construction fatalities in North Carolina last year, and for six of the seven construction fatalities in the Charlotte region. Electrocution and getting caught in or between equipment are the other two leading causes of construction deaths; the U.S. Department of Labor refers to the categories as the "fatal four."

In March, a construction worker in Union County suffered a fatal blow to the head from the bucket of a skid-steer loader while working on a modular brick retaining wall. The loader backed up an incline, which tipped the bucket forward, slamming the worker's head against the retaining wall. The force of the blow left the worker's hard hat pinned between the bucket of the loader and the modular wall after he had collapsed.

The most recent fatality in the Charlotte region was in December, when a construction worker in Lincoln County who was installing snow guards on a sloped metal roof slid from the peak of the roof and fell 22 feet into the building's basement – which was open and 11 feet deep. The worker was taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Lagoe said the OSH Division adjusts its training offerings every year to respond to specific fatality causes, but that making courses accessible to both English and non-English speaking construction workers has been a challenge.

The OSH Division recently hired two bilingual instructors, which will allow OSH to offer its 10- and 30-hour construction industry awareness course in both English and Spanish throughout the year, something it's struggled to do in the past.

"The reason we haven't been able to offer (those courses) on a regular basis is because we don't always have someone that can speak Spanish,"

Lagoe said.

Reaching across languages

The OSH Division has received help from third parties in order to keep Hispanic construction workers safety-aware while off the job and out of the classroom as well.

Starting in the fourth quarter of 2014, Spanish broadcast television network Univision began airing public service announcements aimed specifically at falls and struck-bys. The announcements were paid for by Builders Mutual Insurance Co. and Univision, and construction and development company Skanska USA Building and Univision have agreed to help fund the announcements through March.

"Also, in the public service announcements, there's one that focuses on returning home to loved ones, because in the Hispanic community that's an important message," Lagoe said.

Stricker said safety awareness will be a big focus for Carolinas AGC also this year. Carolinas AGC has an alliance with the N.C. Department of Labor, and plans to renew its alliance with the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation this year, which had been inactive for two years. Stricker said the alliances work well for promoting training opportunities across state lines, especially because a lot of local contractors are active in both states.

"It'll be a cooperate effort," he said. "They'll promote stuff we're doing, and we'll promote stuff that they're doing."

For more information on training courses available through the N.C. Department of Labor, call 1-800-NCLABOR, and for information about Carolinas AGC's training offerings, contact Bill Stricker at 704-372-1450, ext. 5213.

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