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## CAREERS FOR A LIFETIME

### **PetrochemWorks Collaboration Approves Industry Best Practices Related to Onboarding, Training and Funding**

While safety is always at the forefront of every Industrial and Petrochemical initiative <sup>1</sup> that is generated from East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA) and Associated Builders and Contractors of Greater Houston (ABC), it has become apparent that some practices could better serve the industry if they were studied and streamlined, thus the advent of the PetrochemWorks Steering Team. PetrochemWorks was established to bring further alignment between the owner and contractor community, integrate industry-wide messaging to speak with one voice, and remove identified barriers so that a career in the industry is more attractive and attainable. The past year has seen landmark work by the PetrochemWorks group, a collaborative effort between the members EHCMA and ABC.

PetrochemWorks operates as a Steering Team with six owner and five contractor representatives. Eight subcommittees operate under the guidance of the Steering Team, each tasked with a unique set of goals and expectations. Most recently, two of the PetrochemWorks Subcommittees – Onboarding and Training - have completed their sets of best practices and presented those to the Steering Team for approval.

#### **ONBOARDING**

The Onboarding Subcommittee was charged with creating and implementing a survey of the owner and contractor community to find commonalities and/or redundancies and make recommendations related to industry onboarding practices. “It was time to get to work and develop a clear plan to deal with onboarding issues we all knew we had that were slowing us down and causing great frustration for all parties involved – from the owner and contractor, to the craft worker,” says sub-committee chair Mack Hayes of Turner Industries Group. Upon completing its assessment and evaluation of owner and contractor surveys, they produced best-practice recommendations organized around site-specific training, background screening, and basic plus refresher training. The Onboarding subcommittee recommendations have identified industry alignments and standardizations that will assist in eliminating redundancies while maximizing system efficiencies and productivity over time.

Over the last twenty to thirty years the industry has seen a shift from safety training as an external mandate to one that is internally driven by owners and contractors alike. “Everyone knows we’ve got to move in real-time,” continues Hayes. “We think what we’re bringing forward is going to help everyone work more efficiently. We’ve gotten rid of a lot of redundancies that were bogging us down and wasting valuable time.”

Identifying the redundancies and disconnects impacting the onboarding funnel and bringing forward actionable best practices was the primary directive that emerged from the Onboarding Sub-Committee’s work.

The **Site-Specific Training** best practice recommendation was built off the following objective: Provide a Site-Specific Training (SST) Best practice that can improve efficiency and consistency for on-boarding contractor personnel. The sub-committee's formal recommendation calls for SST every two years. The primary benefit of a two-year SST frequency is that the on-boarding process will be expedited, supporting improved efficiency without compromising safety or compliance. This alignment for SST is supported in turn by the group's recommendation for Background Screening.

**The Background Screening** best practice recommendation is geared to embed a process that will improve efficiency for on-boarding contractor personnel by standardizing the requirement for positive identification, utilizing a service with a national database that can verify contractors' background screens, renewing background screens every two years, providing industry-wide portable screens, and finally, encouraging owners to develop a satisfactory process that would allow contract employees on site with a pending background screen waiver. As the average range to clear a contractor is 4 days, the ability to efficiently and rapidly on-board contractor personnel to an owner facility is significantly impacted. It is clear that the lack of portability of background screens has impacted the mobility of contractor personnel.

Finally, regarding **Basic Plus Refresher Training**, the Onboarding Sub-Committee recommends resetting the current refresher training cycle for contract personnel from once a year to every three years. This approach will evolve a framework that will produce a more efficient and safety-conscious workforce with less time away from the jobsite for contractors.

"I think the On-Boarding Sub-Committee has done a good job at identifying critical areas with high impact value for the industry," says Hayes. "Our committee is made up of Owners and contractors. Each side was able to bring insight and practical experience to the process. And everyone had the same goal in mind – make on-boarding as efficient as we can while improving the safety training process. The work we've started here will improve our overall environment across the board."

## **TRAINING**

"As construction and maintenance demands grow in the region, the PetrochemWorks Training Subcommittee realized early on that it is incumbent on both the owner and contractor to work together with one voice to promote the industry as a safe, viable, healthy and sustainable career choice," says PetrochemWorks Training Subcommittee chair Carla Thompson with Turner Industries Group. Thompson states, "Investing in the education of the craft workforce is key to having the most highly skilled craft professional workforce in the Gulf Coast region". To assist in the growth and development of the craft workforce, the PetrochemWorks Training Subcommittee recommends the following:

- Use NCCER Accredited Training for the region.
- Share and transfer critical craft knowledge from experienced employees to those who are new to the craft through a mentorship program - reaching out to helpers and sub-level journeymen.
- Use performance testing to verify competency during training and as an entry to jobs.
- Tie career progression to job performance, and not necessarily time on the job.
- Encourage craft professionals to be technically competent and also customer-focused so they understand how they contribute to the overall success of their team or project.
- Use NCCER curriculum at local high schools, as it offers communication and employability modules.

- Identify ways to insure that evolving technology is integrated into Craft Training.
- Encourage Individuals in college based training to stay committed and complete their program regardless of their employment status.
- Offer and incentivize skill gap training and refresher courses for journeymen.
- Provide opportunities for craft employees to cross-train so that multiple credentials can be earned.
- Leverage on the job training for helper positions, allowing them the ability to gain the skills necessary to advance to journeymen status.
- Define Master Craftsperson as one who has years of experience on the job, has experience practicing their craft in different contexts and projects, has superior communication skills inside and outside their organization, and the ability to think critically about installation and troubleshoot.

Lastly, the PetrochemWorks Training Subcommittee developed a **Craft Training Metrics** to demonstrate the suggested progression and pathway for a craft worker to become a true Craft Professional. The metrics outline skills progression, beginning at skill attainment, and walks the worker through skill verification, to workplace application and ultimately to Craft Professional. The metrics includes valuable point-by-point information that incorporates learning resources, recommendations for third party verifications, suggested helper ratios, mentorship programs and ongoing education and certifications.

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### CRAFT TRAINING METRICS



Of course no training program is possible without financial support. In terms of funding support for training, PetrochemWorks recommends actively encouraging an industry-wide best practice for Owners

and contractors to participate in the **Training Contributor Agreement (TCA)**, which is administered by Construction and Maintenance Education Foundation (CMEF), to increase funding for training and upskilling the workforce. By promoting a community-based approach to training the industry will be able to maintain and upskill a pool of trained workers while attracting new individuals to the industry. This process will then create a higher degree of effectiveness and alignment by eliminating duplication of effort, producing standardized curriculum and credentials while developing quality instruction from certified instructors. This systematic approach allows for a continuous audit process for all training providers, the development of a single national database, and portable/stackable credentials. In the aggregate, this all contributes to a sustainable and aligned model that benefits everyone.

Both Thompson and Hayes concur that the owner and contractor partnerships on their respective sub-committees and the work produced thus far has ramped up enthusiasm among the members, “We’ve all heard the expression, ‘if all you do is complain about the problem, then you’re part of the problem.’ Well, now we’re bringing real solutions to real problems that will have industry-wide impact up and down our workforce funnel.” Thompson adds, “This really is exciting. Because what we’ve put in motion here, especially with regards to alignments, has needed to happen for some time. The models we’ve developed in this process will function to support our work in the future.”

The PetrochemWorks Steering Team will be releasing additional best practice recommendations soon. It is the hope of the Steering Team that owners and contractors will consider these recommended best practices on their jobsites to help make a career in the industry more appealing and attainable to men and women in the region. To learn more about PetrochemWorks, visit [www.petrochemworks.com](http://www.petrochemworks.com).

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ehcma.org/chemical-safety-position-paper/> to view Chemical Safety whitepaper.