



## The Term “Competent Person” Is More Than Just A Title

Because of the complex nature of construction work, it is important that certain job site workers are knowledgeable about construction work practices.

This type of worker is considered a “competent person,” which is a term used frequently in construction safety, but often causes confusion among workers. The definition of a competent person, written in regulatory language by Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), provides only limited help. Title 29 CFR 1926.32(f) supplies the following definition:

“Competent person means one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazardous conditions in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.”

The term “competent person” is cited in 32 different OSHA construction standards, which contain specific training requirements for many types of construction tasks. So, one could deal with many different workers who are considered competent persons at a typical construction site. Examples include: excavations, fall protection, roofing work, noise exposure, lift slab operations, stairways and ladders, scaffold inspections, cranes and steel erection.

When a competent person is required for a job site, that person should understand both the meaning and the responsibilities that come with the title. Being a competent person is about both knowledge and action.

A competent person is one who:

- » Knows the hazards existing or likely to exist, including unsafe work practices.
- » Knows how to control or eliminate hazards.
- » Has the authority to promptly correct hazards and does so immediately.

### How does a competent person fit in with a job site safety and health program?

All construction companies must have comprehensive safety and health programs. The programs must provide for frequent and regular documented inspections of job sites, materials and equipment by competent persons. The day-to-day implementation of safety inspections is the responsibility of the competent persons. Failure to have a competent person inspect work areas results in numerous accidents, injuries, near misses and OSHA violations each year.

### Who is responsible for providing competent persons and safety on job sites?

According to OSHA, the general contractor has responsibility to assure all subcontractors fulfill their obligations with respect to employee safety when it affects the entire site. It’s the general contractor’s

responsibility to assure compliance with the standards, either directly or through a supervisory role. The general contractor is responsible for violations that are preventable or avoidable by reason of supervisory capacity.

Although the general contractor isn't required to duplicate safety efforts of the subcontractors, he or she must be familiar with the safety efforts subcontractors are required to take and whether or not competent persons are required.

The general contractor can rely upon the subcontractor to protect against hazards related to its expertise if the general contractor, after careful consideration, has no reason to foresee work will be performed in an unsafe manner.

Additional information on competent persons can be found on OSHA's website: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

For more information about American Family's Loss Control Services, visit [www.amfam.com](http://www.amfam.com)

**DISCLAIMER**

The recommendations printed here follow generally accepted safety standards. Compliance with these recommendations does not guarantee that you will be in conformance with any building code, or federal, state or local regulations regarding safety or fire. Compliance does not ensure the absolute safety of you, your operations or place of business.