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I thought this month I would talk about the issue of competency. We, as an industry, are constantly dealing with competing goals. On one hand we have launched a federally supported study to look at the issue of HR within our industry nationally – How do we meet our expanding demand for people with the issue of shrinking demographics as the baby boomers retire? On the other hand we often hire quickly, train even quicker and are faced with the real issues of green workers and competency standards within the workforce.

Competency is broadly defined as being made up of three elements, knowledge in the form of some formal training course, actual experience as can only be acquired by doing the job over some period of time, and finally possessing a skill level which meets a defined set of standards which can be easily and accurately measured. Raymond Hull said, “Competence, like truth, beauty and contact lenses, is in the eye of the beholder.” Our industry is being forced to go beyond this statement as more and more of our operations fall under the scrutiny of the public eye. Our levels of due diligence require significant efforts to be made to ensure both public safety and our own worker’s safety are met completely and conclusively. As the old joke goes – What do you call a medical student with a “C-“ for a grade? The answer is “Doctor”. This is not so in our Oil and Gas training courses as many of them require 85 % or greater as the passing mark.

As it relates to our seismic industry in the field, we have developed five courses through PITS:

1. Buried Facilities Locator Training – This course is designed to prevent excavation damage to buried facilities by providing Locators working in the geophysical exploration industry with the necessary skills and knowledge to accurately mark and identify facilities in a safe and effective manner. The information provided in training will provide Locators with an understanding of basic locating principles and ensure a minimal competency in providing locates through hands on training. The hands on training will emphasize the correct and proper use of locating equipment to accurately locate buried facilities, markings, and documentation.
2. Chainsaw Safety Training - This course has been developed in conjunction with the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors (CAGC) to provide a petroleum industry-training standard for low impact seismic (LIS) line construction. It is intended for all workers engaged in seismic line construction activities.
3. Geophysical Field Operations Supervisor - This new course has been developed in conjunction with the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors (CAGC) and regulatory agencies in Western Canada to provide a petroleum industry-training standard for geophysical project field supervision. The purpose of the course is to provide candidates with the necessary knowledge and skills to

- provide field supervision to geophysical exploration projects in a professional manner. The course is intended for anyone who will be engaged in field supervision of geophysical exploration projects.
4. Geophysical Permit Agent - This new course has been developed in conjunction with the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors (CAGC) and regulatory agencies in Western Canada to provide a petroleum industry-training standard for geophysical permitting. The purpose of the course is to provide candidates with the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct permitting activities in a professional and ethical manner. The course is intended for anyone who will be engaged in identifying, contacting and negotiating with landowners and special interest groups with respect to land access, line fees and damages associated with geophysical exploration projects.
 5. Seismic Blasters Safety Training - This one-day course has been developed in conjunction with the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors (CAGC) and government representatives from Western Canada to provide a minimum industry training standard for blasting in seismic exploration. It is intended for workers engaged in seismic shot hole drilling and blasting activities.

These courses may be found on the PITS website at www.pits.ca under the Safety Programs / Geophysical Courses link.

In conjunction with PITS the CAGC has developed “experience log books” so individuals in each discipline may track in conjunction with their current employer their own work experience. Finally each logbook has skill standards for the testing of the final component of competency after the individual has completed a specific amount of time on the job. These logbooks are provided to an individual when they take the course or companies may purchase extra copies through the CAGC.

The experience logbooks are a requirement in BC in many job facets under WCB regulations. We are seeing a push towards similar competency standards in other jurisdictions including Alberta. Recently ***The Herald***, a Calgary newspaper, ran an article in their business section on the need for competency standards for pipeline operators. Listening to the lingo being used by the regulators who govern workplace safety, it is safe to say we are quickly advancing towards greater competency standards throughout industry and the workforce as a whole within Alberta.

In closing I would draw your attention to IRP 17 – Ground Disturbance Guidelines – located at the PSC website – www.psc.ca. As part of this document our Industry will tie Geophysical Locating Standards to the PITS’ Buried Facility Course. As such we will ensure our standard of training is uniform across our industry. Therefore – Buyer Beware – if you are the client – ensure the contractors working for you have training which meets the Industry standard – generally this means PITS training, whether franchised out or not. Look for the logo on the ticket.

From The Thursday Files:

No letters after your name are ever going to be a total guarantee of competence any more than they are a guarantee against fraud. Improving competence involves continuing professional development ... That is the really crucial thing, not just passing an examination.

Colette Bowe