

## Addressing employee safety at Iowa's local transportation agencies

Tom McDonald, Safety Circuit Rider

MAINTAINING safe working conditions and providing employee safety training are major responsibilities for local transportation agencies. Despite common safety needs and concerns among local agencies, however, agencies rarely share or coordinate their safety efforts, resources, and challenges.

CTRE is studying how local agencies currently address employee safety responsibilities and assessing agencies' need for assistance in safety-related communication, cooperation, and training.

In addition to discussing safety training programs with representatives of the Iowa Municipal Workers Compensation Association (IMWCA) and the Iowa DOT, CTRE conducted a survey of local governments.

The survey consisted of 10 specific questions ranging from use of safety coordinators, safety-related meeting schedules, training sources, and need for additional assistance.

Two hundred fifty-four surveys were mailed to Iowa counties and cities with populations over 2,000. Approximately 100 surveys, or 40 percent, were returned.

### Employee safety survey results

The results of this survey indicate that responding local agencies in Iowa do provide a level of safety training and equipment for employees but need reliable resources and assistance.

*Written policies.* Approximately 82 percent of responding agencies indicated they had adopted a written safety policy and/or handbook for employees and that regular safety meetings were scheduled, most of those on a monthly basis.

*Training topics.* Most popular topics for training included blood borne pathogens, confined space, chain saw safety, CPR, first aid, and a variety of other subjects.

*Sources of training.* Cities and counties in Iowa rely on a variety of organizations and resources for safety training including area councils of governments,

insurance companies, CTRE, and local experts. Over 70 separate sources were cited in the survey responses.

When asked if the agency would take advantage of low-cost safety planning assistance and training materials if available, 88 percent responded positively.

*Safety equipment and clothing.* Local agencies provide a wide array of personal protective equipment for employees. Hard hats, steel toed footwear, safety glasses, gloves, hearing protection, and reflective vests are the most common. Other safety equipment available for employees in some agencies includes respirators, work apparel, and first aid kits.

*Safety coordinators.* Approximately 56 percent of responding agencies assign safety coordinator duties to an employee. For only about 29 percent of those coordinators are safety responsibilities a full-time assignment. Most coordinators spend only about 25 percent of their time or less on safety related activities. About 47 percent of responding cities and counties provide specialized training for their safety coordinators.

Over 90 percent replied that their safety coordinator would benefit from attending a conference where issues of common interest could be discussed with peers. Over one half indicated a willingness to serve on an advisory committee to plan such a conference and provide input on specific training needs.

### Safety personnel: your input is important!

To further examine where additional support may be most appropriate, CTRE staff will invite local transportation agency staff to serve on an advisory committee to explore the potential benefits of a statewide conference for safety coordinators in cities and counties. The committee will also consider the possibility of establishing a communication network for coordinators.

Anyone interested in serving on an advisory committee or who wants to offer advice on this subject should contact Tom McDonald, 515-294-6384, [tmcdonal@iastate.edu](mailto:tmcdonal@iastate.edu).

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