

Managing Workforce Medical Care for Remote and Cross Country Projects

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A crucial part of managing any construction project is keeping workers safe and making sure that they have access to timely and effective medical treatment in case of an accident. This becomes a greater challenge when the project is in a remote or sparsely populated location or when the project moves across electrical distribution lines, highways, and pipelines. In sparsely populated areas, companies have to consider how they will communicate with medical services in emergencies; what level of care they will or can provide on site; and how and where they will transport workers, especially those who may be seriously injured. For projects that move across country, the difficulties are compounded by changing variables such as terrain, weather, transportation options, and proximity to populated areas.

Addressing these challenges requires thorough planning. Contractors need to develop and implement emergency protocols for each project, establish relationships with medical providers, especially in areas where their preferred provider networks aren't available, and provide access to remote, round-the-clock medical support for workers who may be many miles away from the nearest town. Because this process is complex, companies may want to work with experts that can assist in developing and managing safety, medical and workers compensation programs.

The primary goal should be to provide quality care for an injured employee as quickly as possible to help ensure early return to health and work. Effective planning and the coordination of the right medical resources are essential in maintaining productivity and managing loss costs.

Emergency Response Planning

Comprehensive safety planning is an important part of any project, but even on the most safety-conscious sites accidents can still occur. That is why it is essential to develop an Emergency Response Plan in advance, especially for projects in remote locations. The plan should cover the needed emergency resources, communications, supervision, and on-site emergency response procedures. All potential hazards should be identified along with the risk control measures to address those exposures and the emergency resources that will be needed in the case of injury.

Often, a general plan can be adapted to a specific project based on a company's area of expertise and past experience. Contractors should be able to identify the most likely types of injuries along with the types of medical providers and specialists that would be required to treat those injuries. For instance, on projects where hand injuries present a heightened risk, companies will want to make sure that they have access to orthopedic surgeons. The emergency plan should cover the medical resources available for minor as well as complex and catastrophic injuries. Everyone on the project needs to know what to do, where to go and what help to expect.

Communication poses a particular concern in remote areas. It is crucial to make sure work crews are able to contact emergency response personnel. Determining the best communication transmission source in the area is critical. In remote areas, it is important to know whether cell phones, satellites, or radio transmissions are the best means of communication. It could mean the difference between life and death. This issue along with the coordination of emergency services should be at the forefront of an emergency

response plan. To prevent confusion and multiple calls, the emergency plan should clearly designate who will be contacting emergency services when an injury occurs.

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Another challenge for remote projects is that a company's preferred medical provider network may not be available. If alternate medical resources are not established ahead of time, injured workers may not receive optimal care from the outset and the company may be faced with higher-than-necessary medical costs. Simply providing a list of medical professionals in the area is unlikely to be adequate. Establishing relationships and communicating the emergency response plan with the appropriate specialists and medical facilities nearest to the project prior to the project progressing into that particular area or location can only enhance the medical treatment outcomes.

With such agreements in place, on-site personnel will know where to call in case of injury, and which facility will be able to have the appropriate specialist on hand when an injured worker arrives. This may also help to reduce costs by avoiding duplicate diagnostic testing, such as X-rays, when a worker is taken first to an emergency room and then to a specialist. As the project's work moves forward into a new area, it is necessary to repeat the process and provide the emergency response plan to a new set of medical providers and emergency first responders. This continued process will help ensure the right emergency service/medical personnel, equipment, and resources will be made available in the case of an emergency.



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