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SPECIALTY CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR: BAKER CONCRETE
Safety Program Wins Accolades

TOP SPECIALTY CONTRACTORS • CLEVELAND MEDICAL MART

BAKER CONCRETE CASTS SAFETY PLAN IN STONE

After receiving national recognition for its worker-safety program, Baker embarks on a path of continuous improvement

BY JOHN GREGERSON



By late August, as the sun set on one of the most scorching summers in U.S. history, it became clear that Monroe, Ohio-based Baker Concrete Construction Co. just might achieve its goal of registering zero OSHA recordable incidents of heat-related injury or illness this season, despite punishing conditions on sites such as that of the new Meldahl Hydroelectric Plant, located east of Cincinnati.

That's no small feat for the 10th-largest subcontractor in the nation (ENR 10/17/11 p. 67), whose territory extends from Phoenix to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and from Washington, D.C., to Aurora, Colo.

"We weren't as fortunate last year," says Mike Schneider, Baker senior vice president and head of the firm's worker safety program. "So, we put a program in place to address the issue of heat-related injuries this past spring. It boils down to one guy looking after the other, so that if conditions warrant you pull that guy off the pour and get him into a trailer."

When the issue is safety, Baker hits its mark. In January the firm earned first place for safety excellence in the Associated General Contractors of Ohio's Construction Safety Excellence Award competition. In March, it earned second place in the specialty division—more than 1 million work hours category—at AGC's National competition in Hawaii.

Everyone Speaks Up

Neither Schneider nor Steve Martin, Baker's general manager for the Midwest region, mentions either competition,

BEST IN STATE
Earlier this year, Baker Concrete earned first place in the Associated General Contractors of Ohio's Construction Safety Excellence Award competition.

though both are eager to lay out the particulars of the firm's *Incident and Injury-Free*® (IIF®) program, which is responsible for the accolades.

"Do you have a wife?" asks Schneider. "A grandchild? If I see someone who's not tied off on a site, here's how I want to initiate a conversation: 'Aren't you and your wife going to the ball game tonight? Well, why don't you tie yourself off so you and your wife get to go and see it?'"

"Which means the foreman really needs to know the workers on his crew, so he can relate the issue of safety to family," says Martin.

"Not only the foreman," says Schneider. "Every worker on payroll has the right and responsibility to speak up." Schneider describes the program, initiated in January 2007, as a five-year journey propelled by an ethical credo. "We're not safe because we have to be, but because we want to be. We truly are our brothers' keepers."

Baker primarily focused on compliance-oriented OSHA training until 2006, when the firm bid on the \$137-million, 545,000-sq-ft Atrium Medical Center in Middleton, Ohio, a joint venture between construction managers Skanska and Shook Construction. "Safety was the first word out of the Skanska super's mouth, even during the prequalification phase," Schneider recalls. He and his colleagues later learned that Skanska had implemented an IIF program comprised of courses such as supervisory skills training, an advanced class for foremen.

Though leading indicators suggested its current training regimens were working, man-hours were soaring as Baker continued busting down regional barriers. Having acquired the breadth of expertise to excel in structural excavation and backfill, formwork and installation, reinforcement installation and placement and finishing, "We became known for taking on big, complex projects no one else wanted," says Schneider.

With its roster ranging from offices and manufacturing plants to powerplants, transportation projects and refineries, Baker, like Skanska, sought assistance from JMJ Associates, a global consultancy specializing in workplace safety. JMJ's client base consists of firms performing large-scale projects in the energy, mining and construction industries.

The effects were immediate: As Baker's man-hours climbed to more than 9.5 million in 2008 from nearly 6 million in 2006, its cost of claims per man-hour declined by 38%.

The program triangulated the issue of safety with those issues of quality and productivity (SQP).

"Safety is essential, but we're also in business to make a buck," says Schneider. "Our program basically addresses three questions: How do you promote safe,



POWER HOUSE Baker currently is at work on the Meldahl Hydroelectric Plant, east of Cincinnati.

productive, quality work; how do you correct at-risk behavior in a dignified way; and how do you reinforce positive behavior in a positive way? If you can give nineatta' boys for every aw, crap, you're doing well."

The SQP program is executed and evaluated in accordance with quantifiable objectives, as outlined during morning huddles, which begin with stretch and flex routines. Foremen and crews then break down the day's tasks as each relates to objectives for quality and productivity. They also analyze safety hazards and the measures required to avoid them.

"Those sessions are intended to be dialogues, not monologues," says Schneider.

So that crews don't grow complacent, first-line supervisors lead weekly 15-minute tool box discussions that not only review recent injuries, but address upcoming work that requires special precautions.

To promote continuous improvement on all job sites, morning huddles are supplemented by weekly meetings among Baker's SQP committee, whose members cut across hierarchical lines, from craftsmen to foremen to project managers and supers. To ensure all voices register, employees serve on the committee for only a month, with 25% of the members changing each week.

Jobsites also fall under the purview of regional safety managers and are subject to periodic inspections by an internal safety task force to ensure operations are in full compliance with Baker's safety policies as well as regulations issued by OSHA and local entities.

The results speak for themselves: Baker's lost time rate dropped to zero in 2011 from 0.97 in 2007. With more than 4 million man-hours logged by late August, the 2012 rate so far is also zero. Recordable injury rates, meantime, declined to 2.31 through August from 7.95 in 2007.

Project sites also are subject to measures involving labor units, schedules and receivables, with resulting job cost reports, issued on both a daily and weekly basis, indicating "where we are on a bid and what, if any, adjustments in manpower are needed," says Martin.

TOP SPECIALTY
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MIDWEST TOP SPECIALTY CONTRACTORS

RANK	FIRM	2011 REVENUE (\$ MIL.)	2011 NEW CONTRACTS (\$ MIL.)
1	BAKER CONCRETE	10.0	10.0
2	SKANSKA	8.0	8.0
3	SHOOK CONSTRUCTION	7.0	7.0
4	JMJ ASSOCIATES	6.0	6.0
5

"Safety is essential, but we're also in business to make a buck."

—Mike Schneider,
senior vice
president,
Baker Concrete
Construction Co.

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BIG POUR Baker contracted to pour 46,600 cu yd of concrete to accommodate a six-drum coker at a BP refinery in Whiting, Ind.

Monthly financial reports weigh labor, material and equipment costs against revenue for every active jobsite. “We can tell where we’ll be at the end of the job and use what we’ve learned on our next bid,” says Schneider.

The Baker U. Curriculum

The bedrock of the SPQ program is in-house training, courtesy of the Baker University, an enterprise dedicated to driving ongoing professional training and education with five “college” programs, including safety training, craft training, technical training, computer training and leadership and management training.

Among other courses at Baker University, one named Pricing and Bidding Strategies, provided under the auspices of leadership and management, seeks to enhance a manager’s ability to execute profitable contracts while decreasing the likelihood the manager will low-bid on unprofitable jobs.



NEW SCHOOL “In the old days, the thinking was safety interfered with quality and productivity,” says Steve Martin, second from left, Baker general manager for the Midwest.



BUSINESS MINDED “We employ folks who love to put concrete in place, but we’re also business people,” says Mike Schneider, center, Baker senior vice president.

Few do, which may explain the firm’s prodigious growth in recent years. Midwest revenue alone totaled \$115 million last year, though Schneider and Martin aim to drive it higher while capitalizing on improving conditions in the Southeast and Southwest. As they discuss strategy, the two sometimes sound as if they were veterans of MBA programs.

“Oh, no,” says Martin, “not business school.”

“Our MBA,” laughs Schneider, “comes from the school of hard knocks.” ■