

Union Carpenters and Contractors Lead the Way with ID Verification Program

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The New Jersey Regional Council of Carpenters, New Jersey Carpenter Contractor Trust (NJCCT) and Building Contractors Association of New Jersey (BCANJ) have developed a *Safe Workplace Program* that will address Homeland Security requirements for outside contractors and their construction employees entering sensitive facilities. In addition to safety and security measures, the program aims to save New Jersey businesses money on future construction projects. Refineries, military bases, pharmaceutical companies and public transportation centers have ongoing needs for construction services. With that need comes the process of hiring outside construction companies and their employees to perform work.

To assist owners with increasing workplace security measures, the Carpenters Union, NJCCT and BCANJ have worked with the Construction Roundtable of New Jersey (CRT) to develop a program that pre-screens a workers' background and verifies their identification. In addition to these pre-screening measures, drug testing and OSHA safety and training data will all be shared in one program. Connie Des Rochers, executive director of the CRT is excited about the partnership. "The CRT represents major New Jersey companies, many managing sensitive facilities that must deal with post-9/11 security requirements. The union carpenters and union contractors have put together a well thought out procedure showing how contractors can enter secure facilities with pre-screened and verifiable documentation thereby reducing a breach in security and enhancing safety." With the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the initiatives outlined in *The National Strategy*,

facilities considered as potentially high-level terrorists' targets must incorporate an even greater degree of security at entry points into their locations. Thomas Kowalyk, CRT chairman and manager of project controls at Johnson & Johnson, New Brunswick, New Jersey, had this to say about the initiative: "We believe that sharing this pool of information represents an efficient and cost effective means of conducting business between owners, construction professionals and members of the CRT." While the program initially shares drug testing and safety data among owners, the sharing of security and background information will represent a new paradigm for the construction industry. Large companies have to "gate process" many employees on a daily basis; they also have to process outside contractors entering their facilities. With increased security demands, these companies will need a secure way to verify outside individuals are, in fact, who they say they are. In June 2003, twenty-one undocumented construction workers were arrested at McGuire Air Force Base using fake Social Security numbers to obtain military clearance. They used the numbers to obtain contractor badges, which granted them access to all areas of the military base.

Security expert Robert Van Dine, director of Global Detection and Reporting(GDR), New York, NY is a part of the consultant team working with the carpenters, contractors and owners. "Verification of identification is the critical component of this program. The days of ID cards with no on-site verification audits are over," explained Van Dine. Many companies still rely on ID cards for visitors that can easily be altered and then used by people with ulterior motives. Without an effective on-site security auditing procedure, companies are still open to a potential terrorist attack. The key component of the project is a software program called *ID Views*. The software provides on-site ID verification match-

ing an individual to their ID card with information contained in the ID Views database. Working with GDR to supply the pre-screened drug testing and security checks, respectively, are Ambassador Medical Services, Inc., Marlton, NJ and FFC Associates, Cherry Hill, NJ. On May 20, 2004, The House of Representatives passed legislation containing a provision authored by Congressmen Chris Smith, Jim Saxton and Frank Loblondo aimed at improving security at military bases by authorizing detailed background checks and skill standards for all contract employees.

To begin what will eventually be a complex program involving 15,000 members, the New Jersey Regional Council of Carpenters decided to start this as a pilot program involving one trade segment of the Carpenters, their Millwrights. Thomas Canto, assistant executive secretary-treasurer explained, "It is a project that involves a lot of protocol and partnerships. By starting with a 'control group' we can refine the process before implementing it within our entire membership."

Michael D'Agostino, senior business representative of Millwrights Local No. 715, Cranford, New Jersey explained why the Millwrights were the logical first choice. "Millwrights have access to some of the most sensitive installations in the state; they work at refineries, cogeneration plants, military bases and nuclear facilities. Stopping potential trouble at the gate of these installations is what this program is all about, and the Union Millwrights are proud to lead the way."

Jack Kocsis, chief executive officer of the Building Contractors Association of New Jersey, points out that the *Safe Workplace Program* is another reason why union contractors are regarded so highly by the owner community. "This program will only further showcase the value a union contractor who employs union craftworkers can bring to a construction project. Instead of individual owners having to ensure workers are drug tested, safety trained and background screened, members of Millwrights Local Union No. 715 will arrive at a facility owner's jobsite with all the required credentials."

For additional information on this program, contact the NJCCT at 732-225-1300.