

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

If You Build It, They Will Come — and Stay:

A safe and inclusive work environment
is the foundation for recruiting and
retaining female workers



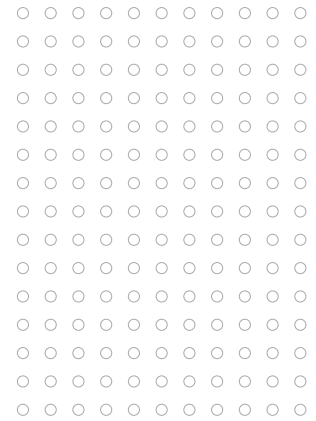
PROVIDE SUPPORT AS MORE WOMEN BUILD CAREERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Construction has been historically a challenging industry for women to grow and succeed. In 2016, women represented just 12.5% of the construction workforce. However, that number is beginning to change. With record-low unemployment drawing more women into the industry, the percentage has increased to 14% in 2022.¹

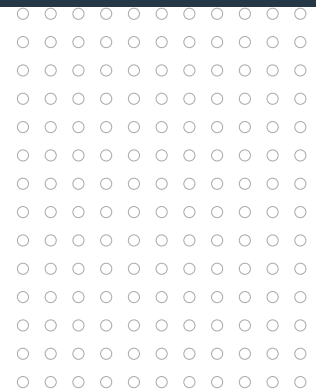
Yet, significant challenges remain. Nearly three-quarters of women in the construction industry feel they have been passed over for better roles because of their gender.² Meanwhile, a growing number of construction companies are recognizing the importance of spotlighting the hard work and positive effect that women have on the industry's workforce.

Each year, the National Association of Women in Construction underscores these struggles by declaring an observance in March as **Women in Construction Week**. The goal is to highlight the importance of creating a fair playing field for women and to ensure they are equally protected and receive the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

The construction industry will face a potential shortage of nearly a half a million workers over the next two years³ — a situation expected to worsen as more Baby Boomers in the industry retire. Creating a gender-inclusive environment that offers equal opportunities for men and women on the worksite is not only a best practice, but will improve construction organizations' ability to successfully recruit and retain female workers.



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¹ Washington Post, "Why are way more women suddenly working in construction?" November 11, 2022.

² EHS Today, "A Spotlight on Women in Construction and Safety," March 7, 2022.

³ Forbes, "Replenishing The Construction Labor Shortfall," August 18, 2022.

5 Ways to Improve Gender Diversity in Construction

EXAMINE PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is not “one-size-fits-all.” Women often have to cobble together PPE that are sized for men. Improperly fitted workgloves and oversized hard hats not only compromise personal safety, but they can impact a woman’s ability to perform her job.

Fortunately, more PPE companies have recognized this issue and now offer PPE based on female anthropometric data. But because fewer women typically work in the industry, companies may delay ordering women’s sizes, leaving female workers with leftover PPE that may be damaged or defective.

Construction firms should contract with PPE vendors that offer a wide range of equipment for both men and women and ensure that PPE is in stock to fit the size and gender of workers on the site.

UPGRADE SANITATION FACILITIES.

Women in the construction industry often face issues with access to sanitary facilities on the job site. Smaller job sites may only have a single unisex portable restroom that oftentimes is not well-maintained. This may force female workers to either face contact with a contaminated toilet seat or to forgo facilities altogether, which leads to a higher incidence of bladder and kidney infections.⁴

While more construction firms are offering improved toilet facilities or gender-designated portable toilets, the practice is not universal. Construction companies that want to attract and retain female workers should:

- Provide additional restroom facilities
- Ensure the toilets’ internal locking systems are adequate and functioning
- Install lighting in sanitary facility areas to protect workers during night hours
- Implement a frequent toilet cleaning and sanitation schedule

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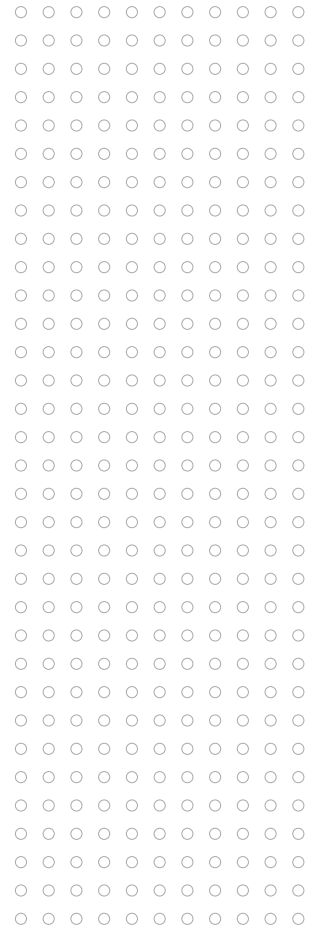
⁴ Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Sanitary facilities at the Construction Site, accessed January 6, 2023.

MAKE ERGONOMICS A PRIORITY.

Workers in construction suffer from more workplace injuries than any other industry. While accidents do happen, ergonomic injuries — which include musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and repetitive motion strains — account for a third of worker injuries, costing employers about \$50 billion annually.⁵ And women are two to five times more likely than men to suffer from an ergonomic injury.⁶

Construction firms can prevent many ergonomic injuries through the combined use of workplace monitoring, body mechanics training, pre-shift exercises and early intervention. But companies also need to consider the physiological differences between male and female workers that put women at high risk of MSDs. Not only are women at greater risk of injury from using equipment that is not designed for their body composition, personal risk factors including medical conditions, personal fitness and medications also can influence the likelihood of ergonomic injury.

Construction companies can take steps to reduce these risks by providing female workers with tools with weight and handle sizes designed for women, instituting safe lifting limits and adding lower or adjustable equipment handles to accommodate a woman's lower center of gravity when performing pushing and pulling tasks.⁷



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⁵ Safeopedia, "Construction Ergonomics: Major Risk and How to Control for Them," April 14, 2022.

⁶ Laborers' Health & Safety Fund of North America, "Improving Safety & Health for Women in Construction," March 2022.

⁷ Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Women in the Construction Workplace: Providing Equitable Safety and Health Protection, accessed January 6, 2023.

CONSIDER REPRODUCTIVE RISKS.

In the construction industry, women face hazards that could affect their reproductive health. Construction firms need to ensure they post material safety data sheets listing all chemicals present on a job site and should encourage female workers who are pregnant or planning to start a family to discuss these toxins with their physician.

Pregnant women on the job site should be diligent about wearing the proper PPE at all times to reduce their exposure to dust, lead or other chemicals, and should follow their physician's guidelines with regards to physical activities.

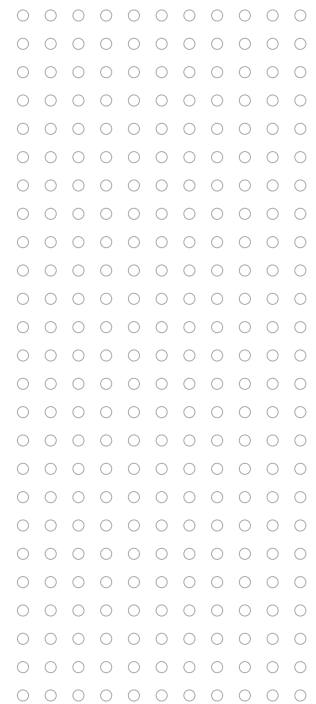
In addition, employers are required by law to make accommodations for pregnant employees in the later stages of pregnancy.

CREATE A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE.

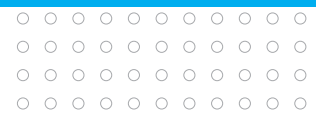
A safe and inclusive culture is key for any industry to maintain a successful workforce. Nearly a quarter of female construction workers report they are frequently sexually harassed on the job, and nearly half of tradeswoman said such harassment was the primary reason they left or are thinking of leaving the construction industry.⁸

A good company culture should include proper safety, health and anti-harassment training, as well as an open system of communication between workers and managers. Female employees should feel comfortable reporting unwanted behavior or concerns to their managers, and companies should maintain a policy for investigating such incidents.

An inclusive workplace culture also should offer equal pay. In 2021, female construction managers only earned about 75 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.⁹ Construction firms should set an example by ensuring employees are paid based on nondiscriminatory factors and pay equity is a priority for workers regardless of gender.



**IN 2021, FEMALE
CONSTRUCTION
MANAGERS ONLY
EARNED ABOUT 75
CENTS FOR EVERY
DOLLAR EARNED
BY THEIR MALE
COUNTERPARTS.**



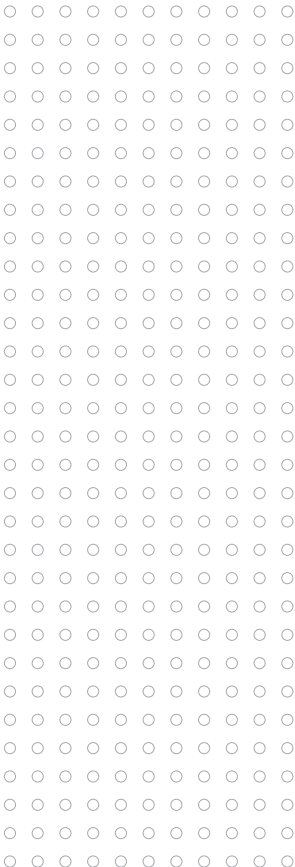
⁸ Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Discrimination, Harassment and a Lack of Respect Threaten to Drive Women Out of the Construction Industry," November 16, 2021.

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey 2021, January 20, 2022.

Workplace Inclusivity: Starts at the Top and Benefits All

Construction firms that create a gender-inclusive workforce will not only have an advantage over competitors in recruitment and retention efforts, they also will benefit from increased innovation, higher engagement and better decision-making skills.

Senior leadership must show workers on the job site that creating a culture that welcomes women as well as men is a priority. Sharing the benefits of hiring more female workers — from gaining new skills and abilities to landing more bids because of gender diversity — will demonstrate the importance to all employees of maintaining an inclusive workforce.



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