



# NEWS RELEASE

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## USACE builds culture of safety in Afghanistan's construction industry

**KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** — A fall through a fragile roof, a collapsed trench engulfs workers, a poorly-maintained crane drops steel columns on a laborer's head; these are just a few of the fatal accidents reported in the international construction industry in recent years; accidents Jeff Ice works hard to prevent.

As a safety and occupational health specialist who deployed to Kandahar from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New York District, Ice's mission includes training and mentoring Afghan construction industry workers in safety and occupational health.

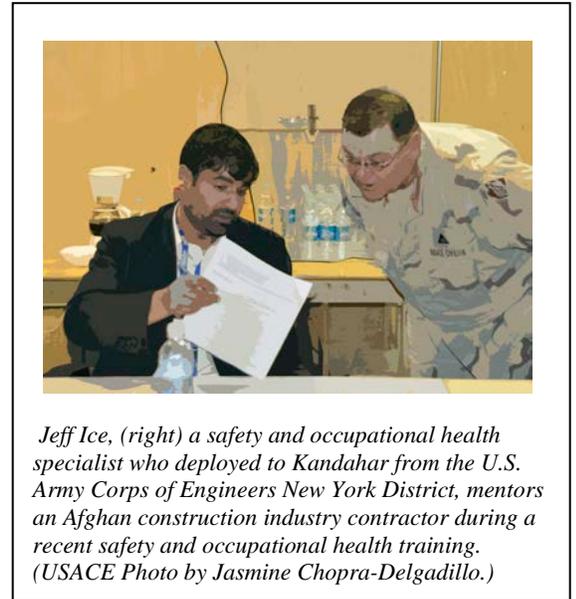
USACE is overseeing construction of public infrastructure including roads, hospitals and military installations in Afghanistan. In many cases, Afghan-owned and operated firms build the infrastructure.

Construction is one of the most dangerous industries worldwide. Safety and occupational health standards in developing nations typically lag behind those in developed ones according to the International Labour Organization, a United Nations agency with government, employer and worker representatives. In Afghanistan, USACE safety and occupational health specialists inspect job sites, the related environment and equipment; and observe labor practices to promote adherence to safety regulations.

Ice, who holds a Master of Science in safety management, is a former construction worker who survived a life-altering fall on the job that resulted in physical disability. He is passionate about protecting workers health and safety and meets with construction contractors quarterly to share and reinforce knowledge during occupational health and safety mentoring sessions.

“Tragic incidents and accidents in the workplace and the consequences of such events have provided us with numerous lessons learned,” said Ice to a group of Afghan and Turkish construction contractors at Forward Operating Base Lindsey during a recent mentoring session. “If we can recognize hazards involved in construction and, more importantly, foster a culture of prevention, we can and will save lives.”

Over the course of the four-hour training, Ice shows instructional safety videos, engages participants in case study evaluations and quizzes them about safety and occupational health knowledge. Topics include fall protection, electrical work, trench safety, collapsing materials, explosions and fires, exposure to harmful substances, transportation accidents and more. Ice also emphasized the economic benefits of maintaining a good safety record.



*Jeff Ice, (right) a safety and occupational health specialist who deployed to Kandahar from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New York District, mentors an Afghan construction industry contractor during a recent safety and occupational health training. (USACE Photo by Jasmine Chopra-Delgadillo.)*

“While participants might not be responsible for the financial management of the companies they work for, anytime an employee can help their company operate more efficiently, that’s a good thing,” noted Ice. “Preventing fatalities, accidents and lost days helps a company’s bottom line.”

What can be done to reduce risks to construction workers? Taking feasible steps to lessen exposure to known hazards is a start, said Ice.

That includes providing workers with the proper personal protective equipment such as safety shoes, hard hats, safety glasses and hearing protection. For high-risk activities like working at heights above six feet, trained workers equipped with safety harnesses, properly-maintained fixed or mobile platforms or scaffolds equipped with standard guard rails should be used.

“The training we participated in involves many of the issues workers experience at job sites daily,” said Dost Mohammad, an Afghan civil engineer and contractor working on an Afghan National Security Forces construction project in Kandahar.

Beyond simply following regulations, the real challenge is adopting a culture that values safety and seeks to reduce risks whenever possible, even if it means delaying construction until deficiencies can be corrected, explained Ice.

“We want to do the right thing ... protect workers and make construction sites safer,” said Mohammad.

Ice stressed that mentoring sessions support that goal.

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