John Salley is a project executive with Bovis Lend Lease, Inc. in Chicago, IL, and Robert Cote, CSP, is senior regional safety manager for Gilbane Building Company, also in Chicago. In this interview, Salley and Cote provide background on the Build Safe Chicago initiative and discuss how it is expected to improve occupational safety and health for construction workers in the Chicagoland area.

**BP:** Please provide a brief description of your professional backgrounds and of your roles with the Build Safe Chicago initiative.

**JS/RC:** The Build Safe Chicago group is comprised of safety professionals, project managers and project superintendents. Our roles as individuals have been and will continue to be to attend all monthly group meetings so that consensus could and can be reached on all elements/topics that have been included and agreed to in the Build Safe Chicago Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Each person is required to attend the meetings as necessary and to discuss the proposed initiatives with their own company’s leadership so buy-in/approval is reached.

**BP:** What is Build Safe Chicago, and why was it formed?

**JS/RC:** Build Safe Chicago is a group representing seven of Chicago’s leading construction companies. It was established approximately three and a half years ago in an effort to consistently and uniformly raise the level of health and safety for construction workers in the Chicagoland area.

**BP:** What companies belong to the Build Safe Chicago coalition, and what must they agree to do to remain part of the coalition?

**JS/RC:** The companies that currently make up the Build Safe Chicago group are:
- Gilbane Building Company
- Kenny Construction
- Lend Lease
- James McHugh Construction
- Mortenson Construction
- Power Construction
- Turner Construction Company

Each member agrees to implement and adhere to all aspects and initiatives detailed in the Build Safe Chicago MOU.

**BP:** What areas of construction occupational safety and health does Build Safe Chicago primarily address?

**JS/RC:** Build Safe Chicago will address:
- PPE
- CPR
- Fall protection
- Hole and shaft protection
- Electrical safety
- Public interface isolation and protection
- Emergency action plans
- Worksite hygiene facilities
- Disciplinary policy
- Drug, alcohol and smoking prohibition
- Safety prequalification of subcontractors
- Third-party equipment inspections
- Crane operator training and certification
- Worker orientation

**BP:** How were the Build Safe Chicago Safety and Health Standards compiled, and do they include any national voluntary consensus standards?

**JS/RC:** The topics contained in the MOU were identified as the main issues, which historically have had the potential to cause worker injury, or included initiatives necessary to address so that worker safety overall would improve and benefit. The team met consistently over a three-year period to develop and gain consensus on improving a variety of what were agreed to be the most important health and safety topics affecting the industry. The resulting effect is anticipated to improve the overall level of safety for workers thereby establishing a higher benchmark across the Chicago construction community. Given that seven of the major construction management and general contracting firms are now fully engaged partners in the venture, a new, higher and improved level of consistent expec-
tions regarding health and safety has been placed into operation on all partner sites. By consistently employing the applications across all sites, the potential for worker confusion regarding health and safety expectations from one site to another is thereby eliminated.

**BP:** How have construction workers responded to Build Safe Chicago thus far? Has the coalition seen a decrease in incidents and/or injuries?

**JS/RC:** Advertising and publicizing the initiative is somewhat in its infancy. The group will be better able to answer this question in the future.

**BP:** What are Build Safe Chicago’s goals for the year?

**JS/RC:** Our goals moving forward are to determine the most effective means by which to advertise and publicize Build Safe Chicago (speaking at trade shows, meeting with industry groups, etc.), continually identify new and innovative approaches to improving worker safety and garner support and engagement from other construction companies who are not currently participating.

**BP:** How can interested construction firms join the Build Safe Chicago coalition?

**JS/RC:** Interested construction firms may contact any of the participating members, but for ease of reference, they can contact us at rcole@gilbaneco.com or john.salley@bovislendlease.com.

**BP:** What advice do you have for other major cities that would like to institute a Build Safe program?

**JS/RC:** The best advice we could offer would be to make their programs detailed, specific and meaningful and to hold all participants accountable.

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Many “Build Safe” initiatives have been established over the course of several years and although recognized as honorable ventures, they have not necessarily developed as specific a set of tenets as that set forth by the Build Safe Chicago team. The topics addressed within the Build Safe Chicago MOU detail specific, tangible and measurable applications, which once adhered to will undoubtedly improve the current level of health and safety applied across all participating firms’ project sites.

**BP:** What do you consider to be Build Safe Chicago’s greatest successes since its launch?

**JS/RC:** The greatest success to date is the establishment of a group essentially representing the Chicago construction industry who were prepared to set aside competition and to work together all in the name of health and safety.

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