Standards Insider

Ken Shorter

PS: What is your role on the A10 ASC, Safety Requirements for Construction and Demolition Operations.

Ken: For more than 30 years, construction and safety have been two passions in my life. At the end of the day, when I leave the construction site, I frequently went home to build a deck, gazebo or kitchen addition. When I volunteer, it is likely to join a crew rebuilding storm-damaged homes. It is safe to say that I am a construction junkie. ASSE has been another passion in my life, so it was an honor to be selected to represent the Society on the ANSI/ASSE A10 committee. I am liaison to the A10.34 Subcommittee for Protection of the Public on or Adjacent to Construction Sites.

PS: Why are ANSI standards important?

Ken: Let’s put ANSI standards into perspective using a ladder as a metaphor. Cutting-edge ideas are the top rung, while minimum legal standards, such as OSHA regulations, are the bottom rung. ANSI falls in between. Consensus standards represent a balance between business, labor, technical experts, manufacturers and other interested parties. ANSI standards tend to incorporate the best proven ideas relatively rapidly, without the politics of OSHA rulemaking.

Anyone who uses OSHA compliance as a goal has aimed low. OSHA standards are minimum standards that are frequently out of date. For example, OSHA’s 1926.550 crane standard was updated in 2010. Yet, it still references ANSI standards from the 1950s and 1960s. Do you think cranes have changed much in 50 years? Is your aim to meet 50-year-old ideas of safety particularly on critical issues, such as cranes? ANSI A10 standards give field safety personnel an opportunity to know the generally accepted best practices in construction safety so they can maximize their effectiveness.

PS: What challenges does A10 ASC face?

Ken: First is the economy. The committee is 99% volunteers. The slow economy has affected all businesses, and the effect on construction has been particularly severe. That leaves far fewer hours and dollars for volunteer work. At the same time, some of the more controversial standards have become much more time consuming to produce. Second, we have to get the standards into the hands of those who can use them in the field. The best information in the world is of little significance if it is not distributed to the people who need it.

Some safety practitioners still are not familiar with ANSI standards and, therefore, do not recognize their value. Other safety practitioners simply do not have the resources to purchase standards. These are roadblocks we need to address. We do not want companies learning the value of ANSI standards by losing lawsuits because they did not provide a reasonable level of safety.

PS: Describe the focus of A10.34.

Ken: A10.34 overlaps many of the other A10 standards. Imagine the number of issues that affect public protection related to planning, training, fire prevention, explosives, excavations, traffic control, cranes, demolition, road paving, fall protection, rapid transit systems, airports, railroads, high-rise buildings, marine work and similar issues. The number of public hazards and their various sources on construction and demolition sites can be mind-boggling.

PS: Can you share some examples of the A10 standards in action in the field?

Ken: The great value these standards provide is their direct application to field operations. Many safety practitioners have limited experience in the entire breadth of construction and demolition operations. Highway contractors probably are not familiar with roofs. Tunnel contractors might not know about digger derricks and hardly anyone has experience with dredging. Yet, anyone with a strong construction background can buy a standard and quickly get up to speed on the hazards of a new operation. Scaffolds are a great example. A wide range of scaffolds exists, and the ANSI standard covers each type.

PS: What advice can you offer ASSE members interested in standards work?

Ken: Start by focusing on yourself. Get the best possible education and combine it with challenging experience. Get certified by BCSP and find a dedicated employer who will support your volunteer work. Then, contact the committee you want to serve on and find a way to join. The water is great. Jump in.

Ken Shorter, CSP, ARM, TCDS, is a consultant for McDonough Bolyard Peck, an award-winning consulting firm specializing in construction management. His career has focused on heavy construction projects, including rapid transit systems, tunnels, airports, dams, bridges, highways, marine projects and offshore oil platforms. Recently, Ken managed construction safety for a $1.4 billion project at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and renovation work for the National Institutes of Health. Shorter holds an M.S. in Safety from the University of Southern California. He is a professional member of ASSE’s Chesapeake Chapter, and belongs to the Society’s Consultants, Construction, Management and Risk Management/Insurance practice specialties.