

A Company Priority

Duran & Venables wins third straight EUCA safety award

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California Construction

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Safety definitely does not take a backseat at Milpitas' Duran & Venables, which says the secret to keeping workers safe in grading and paving jobs that typically involve large-scale excavation and trenching close to utilities is to go above and beyond what industry standards require.

For Duran & Venables, the road that led it to three safety awards in as many years from the Engineering & Utility Contractors Association began with a philosophy.

"The concept is that every one of our job-site workers is not only responsible for his or her own safety, but responsible for observing safety rules within their own work crew and for everybody's safety," says Sean Venables, president and CEO of the Milpitas-based grading and paving construction firm. "Everybody watching out for everybody else – that's our basic philosophy."

The company recently received the 2006 Safety Award from the EUCA, a national trade organization representing more than

400 contractors, vendors, engineering and design firms and public agencies. The top honor, which Duran & Venables also won in 2004 and 2005, is awarded to companies based on several considerations, including the number of employee workdays lost to injury, workers' compensation modification rates, and the company's safety policies.

Duran & Venables was the only winner in the 150,001-250,000 manhour category.

"You've got to be honored with this type of thing," says Duran & Venables safety officer Gary Rudy. "More importantly, we believe that our efforts to inform and educate our employees concerning hazards on the jobsite are working. We're very >>

proud and fortunate to have lost zero workdays in the past three years. That's over 600,000 manhours."

Venables and Rudy say the secret to keeping workers safe in grading and paving jobs that typically involve large-scale excavation and trenching close to utilities is to go above and beyond what industry standards require. For example, workers are not only taught basic safety protocols. They're drilled on them every day.

"We're attempting to change a culture of safety habits," Rudy says. "In order to start that process, we have daily employee tailgate safety meetings at the job sites. Instead of one person standing up and preaching, we try to have everyone become more aware of what's going on around them. Everyone is asked to respond to the question of who's responsible for safety. The answer we're looking for is 'I am.'"

Venables says that an employee's knowledge of safety policies is useless unless he or she has the power to put that knowledge into action.

"We go out and train all of our foremen, project managers, and estimators so that



each is what is called a 'competent person' in excavation and trenching," he adds. "They're trained in all aspects of excavation and the safe and proper way to do things. They not only know what safe practices are, they also have the power and authority to actually shut a project down if they see an unsafe condition."

The company also trains every worker in every crew in how to safely excavate around utilities.

"It's impossible for any one person to say 'I'm responsible for all the safety practices here,'" Venables says. "So everyone has to step up to the plate and take it on."

Rudy and Venables say the goal is for safety awareness to become second nature for their employees. They add that once that happens, workers are safer on the job and off. Along with its efforts toward workplace safety, the company has trained 50% of all its employees (about 150 people during peak seasons) on first aid and CPR.

"The reality is that safety habits can be taken home with you," Rudy says. "The employee will return to work Monday as well and healthy as when he left the job Friday."

In the most recent award presentation, EUCA CEO Mark Breslin says the competition to win the award is always fierce.

"Winning the EUCA Safety Award once is something to be proud of, but to win three times, as Duran and Venables has, is truly remarkable," Breslin says. "They are leading the industry with their safety programs, and continue to demonstrate their relentless dedication to the well being of their employees." <<

