

# Safety Issues

## Competent Person



### Tech Tip

A Competent Person must now have knowledge and authority.

The term "Competent" is synonymous with knowledge, understanding and ability. When related to the scaffold industry, it meant a person who, through knowledge and experience, could erect safe scaffold.

During the inception of OSHA in 1970, the term "Competent Person" was expanded to include responsibility and knowledge. The addition was not used when referring to scaffold erection and dismantling. It was not until the latest revision to 29 CFR Part 1926 Subpart L, effective November 1996, that the alternate meaning came to the forefront in our industry.

### OSHA's Definition

OSHA currently defines a "Competent Person" as:

"One who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or work conditions that are **unsanitary, hazardous or dangerous to employees**, and **who has the authority to take corrective measures** to eliminate such hazards."

### Impact on the Scaffold Industry

How does this new definition of Competent Person affect us? The term no longer applies to all erectors that may be experienced in erecting and dismantling scaffolds. In other words, in OSHA terms, we can no longer call our erectors "competent" even though they may have had extensive classroom training and can erect all types of scaffold.

A Competent Person must now, in addition to having the extensive experience and knowledge regarding scaffold erection and dismantling, also possess knowledge of other job site conditions which could affect the health and safety of fellow workers and have the **authority** to correct or eliminate those hazards. As it is understood, a Competent Person could be more than one person on the job site.

A Competent Person could be a collection of company workers, each an expert in their own discipline, that have the collective authority to abate potential hazards.

In other words, a Competent Person(s) must not only have the required knowledge, but must also have been given the **authority** by his or her employer to eliminate recognized hazards or unsafe conditions.

This places an increased responsibility to assure that not only the scaffold is erected in a safe manner, but also that the surrounding work place is safe during erecting or dismantling operations.

### Addressing the Issue

At Safway we already have identified those individuals who possess the needed knowledge and have given them the required authority to eliminate recognized job site hazards. In addition, they are supported by a Safety Team to provide expert assistance when needed.

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