Communication in Multilingual Environments: Clarity Saves Lives Fatality File



Worker Hispanic construction worker fatalities more than doubled over the last decade as language barriers, lack of training in native languages, and unsafe conditions go unaddressed

What Happened

Between 2011 and 2022, fatalities among Hispanic construction workers increased by 107.1 percent — more than doubling — while deaths among non-Hispanic construction workers rose 16.5 percent over the same period, according to a December 2024 report by the Center for Construction Research and Training. In 2022 alone, 408 Hispanic workers died on construction job sites. From 2021 to 2022, Hispanic construction workers accounted for 34.5 percent of nonfatal injuries involving days away from work — in a workforce where Hispanic workers represent approximately 34 percent of the total construction labor force. Investigators and safety advocates consistently identify the same contributing factors: language barriers, lack of training materials in native languages, and environments where workers cannot clearly understand instructions, communicate hazards, or raise concerns.

What Went Wrong

“Latine workers fill critical workforce gaps while disproportionately facing the most dangerous working conditions,” said Ligia Guallpa of the Worker’s Justice Project. “They do so with little access to training or work protections, weak enforcement and fear of retaliation if they speak up.” Language barriers are not a soft communication problem — they are a documented, measurable, and deadly safety gap. When hazard warnings, safety instructions, and training materials are not delivered in a language workers fully understand, the hazard is never communicated — and workers cannot protect themselves from what they were never clearly told.

The Bottom Line

In 2024, Hispanic or Latino workers experienced the highest occupational fatality rate of any group for the eighth consecutive year — 4.3 deaths per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers. Communicating safety in the language each worker actually understands is not a courtesy. It is a legal obligation and a life-or-death responsibility.

Source: https://www.enr.com/