

History of Hoover Dam Construction - Not All Good

The building of Hoover Dam in California was a great construction feat, but with a heavy price. The shape of the canyon and building of the public highway across the top of the dam made this location a very scenic stop for the travelling public. If you didn't know, Hoover Dam construction took place between 1931 and 1935.

Many, many years ago a Hanks relative said, "Always praise the bridge that carries you safely over." Hoover Dam is such a bridge that should be praised by all travelers crossing over, and here's why.

In 1922, Surveyor J.G. Tierney drowned while looking for the ideal location to build the dam. He is considered to be the first death associated with the building of Hoover Dam. And in fateful irony, exactly 13 years later his son would be the last worker killed during the construction of the dam - a heavy price to pay for one family.

Having said that, did you know that in between those two deaths there were also 110 worker deaths associated with the construction of the dam? Does that number seem high for four years of construction? Unequivocally, yes it does! What is not as well known, but should be, is the number of deaths not included in the official fatalities statistics that were deaths recorded as a result of "pneumonia". That's right - pneumonia. Workers on the dam alleged that there was a cover-up regarding deaths due to carbon monoxide poisoning on the project. The total number of "pneumonia" deaths was 42. No deaths were recorded due to carbon monoxide poisoning. Most of the workers for the dam construction lived in Boulder City. Also of significant interest, during that time, there were no deaths of non-workers in the city due to pneumonia. This is powerful data. It is highly likely there was suppression of the truth regarding those 42 deaths.

In examining the history of "accidents" during construction of Hoover Dam do we see a familiar pattern in human behavior? If we are to frame this in the words of a contradiction, it appears that those who have responsibility in the face of an accident do not actually accept responsibility, but try to frame the story. These are human behaviors that belong to an unsafe mindset. In this example and many others, the unsafe, whether through management and supervisor tolerance or looking the other way or just accepting that people just get killed on such a project as this, press forward with the mechanics of a job accompanied by ignoring the risks and only reacting when something is proven to be dangerous. Performance / Production are the default priority over safety. Perhaps this dam's epitaph should read, "152 people paid the ultimate toll for the travelling public crossing Hoover Dam."

In retrospect, we can see that this is neither preventative nor inventive thinking. I ask that you consider how you would respond if you knew in advance that 152 people would die on your project? Consider also that your country is watching your performance. What measures would you take to prevent such a disgraceful number of deaths? What types of solutions might you employ to create better safety in the face of unknown risks?

During a labor strike at the Hoover Dam a protest sign read: "Death is so permanent." We could not agree more.

The mystery of the additional forty two deaths is what it is, but no one can argue that far too many workers died during the construction of Hoover Dam. Frankly, from a safety standpoint, the dam project was a dismal failure. The vast majority of the public-at-large don't know about the heavy human toll that was paid for building Hoover Dam . . . but the families and friends of those people who died on the job know the pain of losing a loved one.

Yes, we should praise this bridge for carrying us safely over!

For a more in-depth study regarding fatality accidents in the workplace go to Chapter 3 – Analysis of Safety Flaws and Failures - of our book, *Safety Under Construction—A Quest for Safety Perfection Utilizing Inventive Thinking where we discuss the psychological aspects of safety that include how we are affected mentally, emotionally and physically*. It is a must-read for individuals and anyone who wants to dramatically improve the Culture of Safety within your organization and make unlimited strides for safety success.

Go to: <http://www.SafetyUnderConstruction.com> in order to obtain a great sense of this newly published book on safety and risk. There you will see a representative preview and reviews of a book that needs to be read, taken to heart and shared. Lives depend on it.

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