



Safety Isn't a Department. It's a Mindset.

December 2018

Introduction

When Primus first opened its doors in 2000, the team was made up of three people in a single office. Nearly two decades later, Primus is a focused core group of related companies with over 150 employees and projects all over the country. With this kind of growth comes risk. Our safety approach had to evolve beyond a small business mentality to protect the assets of one of the industry's largest design-build service providers.

Finding a Leader

"The first step was hiring a full-time safety director," said Primus President Matt Hirsch. "We wanted someone who could focus solely on safety," he said. The candidate would also be responsible for developing a new safety culture. "One that would encourage our teams in the office and the field to view safety as an essential component of how we do business," he said.

Primus conducted a nationwide search. The selected candidate, Theresa Ciatto, was already familiar with Primus; she served as a health and safety specialist at Risk Management Partners, Inc. (RMP), Primus's third-party safety consultant. "We knew Theresa had a solid safety background with extensive training experience," said Hirsch. "She was the obvious choice."



Director of Safety Theresa Ciatto addresses the on-site team at Primus's United States Cold Storage project in Covington, TN.

A Holistic Safety Approach

Primus is comprised of three divisions: Design, Builders and Thermal Envelope. Ciatto's first task was to determine the safety needs of each group. "Each division is different," she said. "And each one is made up of different types of people. The trick is figuring out not just what level of safety training and oversight a group requires, but how to bring that information to each group."

Design

Ciatto offered the design team a General Industry OSHA 10-hour training class. Instead of an active construction site, General Industry certification focuses on the building itself. The designers learned how to design so that the finished building would be compliant. For example, one of the topics was ladders. In the past, when designing a ladder over 20 feet high, designers had to include a cage around the ladder. The new standard requires the individual climbing the ladder to wear fall protection. Instead of cages, ladders must now be designed to support that gear. "Theresa did a great job of helping our team understand the why behind the change and how we could help our clients by designing a facility that they can operate safely," said Vice President of Design Tammi Bailey, AIA.



Superintendent Maricella Pollard thanks the on-site team during Primus's celebration of 200 Safe Days at our Dot Foods project in Bullhead City, AZ.

Builders

Because Primus Builders is responsible for the entire active construction site, this division requires the most comprehensive safety approach. All project managers and superintendents are OSHA 30-hour certified and First Aid & CPR certified. "We have seen an increase in the number of participants in our face-to-face training vs. online training," Ciatto said. "Thirty team members received their OSHA 30 in person, and 20 received their 10-hour in person. I am pleased to see those numbers go up." Primus team members are also encouraged to participate in additional training offered by Ciatto or RMP on topics such as fall protection.

"Everyone deserves to have the knowledge that ensures a safe and healthful work environment," she said. "I want them to feel empowered to come up with solutions." This includes subcontractors. Theresa offers training to our subcontractors if she or our on-site superintendent determines their skills need strengthening.

Ciatto has also developed on-boarding videos that let new employees, subcontractors and visitors to the project site know Primus's expectations for safety. Videos are recorded in English and Spanish to ensure all team members understand our specific safety standards.

Thermal Envelope

Primus self-performs insulated metal panel installation and roofing services. In addition to OSHA, First Aid and CPR training, team members in this division receive safety training focused on specific tasks. This includes hands-on equipment training for vacuums, forklifts, scissor lifts, etc. "The most important factor in training our panel teams is to let them be themselves. Their jobs can be dangerous, and they need to feel comfortable enough to ask questions," Ciatto said. "And if there are senior members of the group who have a lot of safety experience, I let them take an active role in teaching the class. Learning from your tenured teammates is an important training tool."

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Developing Our Safety Culture

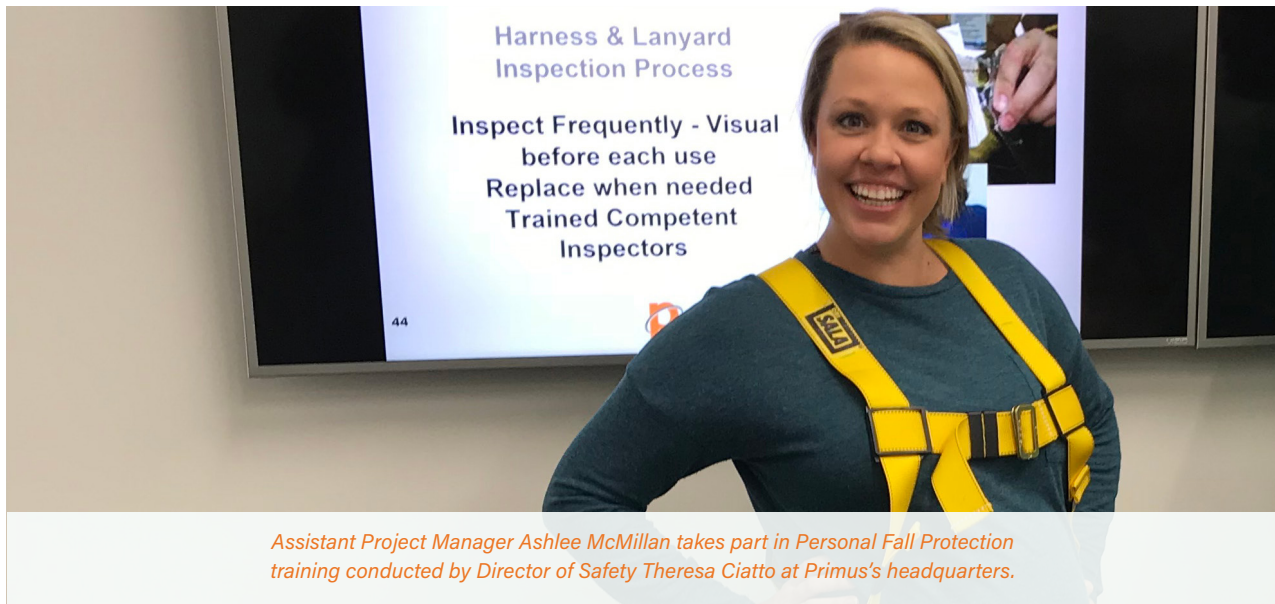
Ciatto is creating a safety culture that extends beyond training. "I want everyone to understand the impact safety has in every area of our business," she said. "I want everyone to be tuned into it. Reducing our EMR, improving our systems... doing these things reduces our risk and exposure," she said.

Best in Class Safety Program

One of Ciatto's goals is to encourage our field teams to improve their training documentation, safety audit scores, and zero incident rates. "These indicators can affect our ability to achieve our business goals," she said. She created a program that offers tokens of appreciation to team members who consistently complete these criteria. "I am so happy to see the improvements in these areas," she said. "It's still a work in progress, but the teams are more vested in the process, especially our panel guys."

Learning Management System

Ciatto understands that the key to safety is education. She has started to develop a video series that includes training on specific equipment or processes. These videos are available to all Primus employees in English and Spanish as part of Primus University. If certain roles require the training, a short quiz is available at the end of each video to test aptitude.



Assistant Project Manager Ashlee McMillan takes part in Personal Fall Protection training conducted by Director of Safety Theresa Ciatto at Primus's headquarters.

Debriefing

Primus recently instituted a project debrief process that allows project teams to set up debrief milestones during the course of a project. Team members share lessons learned and ideas for improving on future projects. Ciatto ensured safety was included as an agenda item for each meeting.

Ciatto's hard work is paying off: our EMR has dropped. Plus, Primus recently earned a Risk Control Award of Excellence from our insurance provider for improvements to our safety program.

Safety Success Starts at the Top

All of this success couldn't be achieved without the unyielding support of Primus's executive team. "The success of a safety program starts at the top," Ciatto said. "Without the executive team behind me, this wouldn't be possible." Rich O'Connell, Erik Gunderson, Matt Hirsch, and Paul Grenier all believe in the training and the process because they see the results. "Theresa has turned around our safety program," said Hirsch. "We will continue to support her efforts to make us a better company."



Safety stand down at Primus's Sysco project in Jacksonville, FL.

To learn more about Primus, its design-build approach, and its unmatched commitment to safety visit [PrimusBuilders.com](https://www.primusbuilders.com)