
The World’s Largest Recycling Project
Producer Profile: Alby Materials Gives Back to the Community
How to Structure an Internship Opportunity
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The Professional’s Choice Since 1908
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Grassroots Activism – Not Just for Company Executives!

Grassroots activism has long been touted as one of the most effective ways to influence legislators. Members of Congress (MOCs) cannot possibly know how their constituents think about various issues if their constituents do not tell them. And while grassroots activism continues to rise within the ready mixed concrete industry, it is extremely important that these efforts are encouraged by industry members at all levels. Certainly it is effective for company executives to communicate to MOCs how legislation would impact the overall company; it is equally effective for others within the corporate structure (supervisors, dispatchers, drivers, administrative personnel, etc.) to communicate how the same legislation could impact their own livelihoods.

One example of the need for total industry participation in grassroots activities concerns the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which has been extended through the end of February 2004. The transportation construction community continues to advocate for a significant increase in transportation funding. However, these efforts are being met with some resistance on the part of the Bush administration and some Republican congressional leaders despite visits and other grassroots communications by industry members. These legislators simply do not realize the positive impact that a long-term, well-funded surface transportation bill would have on the nation’s economy nor do they realize the negative impact that delaying the bill or providing inadequate funding would have not only on companies and individual employees, but also on so many Americans stuck in traffic each and every day.

Communication with legislators is easier than ever and no longer just the tool of the politically savvy. Resources abound on the Internet for finding who your legislators are and how everyday people can let their legislators know what they think about issues affecting their lives. Personal communication with legislators is also an excellent way to find out where he or she stands on issues and helps people decide whether they want to support him or her in the next election – or not.

With so many issues at stake this Congress – TEA-21 reauthorization and the Power Take-off (PTO) Tax Correction being just two of many – please take this opportunity to encourage both your colleagues AND your employees to exercise their power and influence their Members of Congress.

For information on issues, legislation, Members of Congress or other questions, please contact NRMCA’s Government Relations Department at 1-888-846-7622.

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In 2003-2004 we assisted a Southwest company in the areas of CEO succession planning, restructuring and strategic analysis. The process included recruiting a CEO and several vice president-level positions. Following a meeting, one of the managers asked, “Why was the company conducting an external search for a vice president position?” My response was simple, “Do you have someone prepared to replace your position?” The manager looked a little surprised but quickly replied, “No, not really.” I responded that the organization has some great talents that certainly are vice president material but they had not been properly prepared for that transition.

What Factors Impact Our Decision?

Since the tragedy of 9/11, many companies have reduced or eliminated training initiatives, impacting the development and preparation of the organization for future growth. The concrete industry as a whole and each company individually must evaluate where they will be in five to 10 years and ask some important questions, such as “who will lead our company/industry in a number of very important areas?”

URGENCY. Sometimes the urgency or crisis of a situation requires the experience and skill set of an external recruit. Are you going through a major change? Perhaps you are transitioning to a new business model or facing unrelenting competition as never before. Do you have an internal leader who has the experience of leading such a change? Is it worth the risk of hoping someone is ready for this new role versus a proven leader who has done it before?

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tion is going to be five years down the road. This kind of leadership can develop the organization according to the plan. Great companies have development strategies to transition people from employee to supervisor, supervisor to manager and manager to executive. These transitions take time, mentoring and development processes with the right company culture.

**COST.** Many times companies must recruit because they have not been willing to spend the money to develop. However, I would challenge companies to analyze the cost. It is amazing to see many clients who will drop hundreds of thousands of dollars on recruiting but are not willing to step up to the plate to invest in the skills and competencies to develop people for leadership positions. It typically takes a minimum of three to five years to prepare someone to move into the next level of responsibility. Remember the adage “pay now or pay later.” If you don’t develop, you will pay later but you will pay.

How Can We Develop Leaders in Our Organization?

As a consulting firm that recruits and develops, we have a revenue stream from both services and would be happy to assist you with a recruiting or development process. However, I will say that it concerns me to visit an organization and readily notice that they have capable people to promote into higher-level roles but these people have not been adequately prepared. It is very disappointing. As an executive are you preparing your people for the next level of leadership? Let me provide you with a list of things to consider in developing leaders:

- 360-degree feedback
- University programs
- Mentoring initiatives
- Internal training and development programs
- External seminars and conferences
- Individual self-paced programs
- Job rotation between departments

The 360-feedback is one of the tools we use to assess and develop a plan for high potential. The 360 compares the feedback of self, boss, peer and employee. Succession planning particularly focuses on peer feedback as effective leaders get great feedback from their own peers. It makes sense that if an organization is going to potentially promote employees to lead their peers that they receive their feedback years earlier and develop their ability to lead leaders.

In conclusion, an organization will always have positions and times when it must recruit because of growth or business demands. However, with commitment, planning and resource allocation, most companies could spend less money and get better results if they would commit to becoming an organization that develops leaders. I close with only one question. Will the company need to recruit someone to take your job?

Brent Strehlow is the founder and president of Training Moments Inc. in Grapevine, Texas. A frequent speaker and consultant to the concrete industry, he has worked with thousands of managers and executives in 46 states and six countries, and is the author of the acclaimed development program, “The 6 Levels of Leadership.”
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2003 Ready Mixed Concrete Industry Data Report
Benchmarking Industry Health and Company Performance

By Julie Luther, Senior Vice President
National Ready Mixed Concrete Association

Each year, the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association’s Business Administration Committee sponsors the compilation of the Ready Mixed Concrete Industry Data Report, a nationwide financial and operational benchmarking survey. This report provides individual companies with vital operational feedback by which to evaluate and improve company strength and performance. It also serves as an excellent tool for company valuation — both for companies looking to acquire as well as those trying to position themselves for sale. Finally, the survey report is an important source used by NRMCA’s personnel in monitoring and reporting on the state of the ready mixed concrete industry on a national and regional basis. For example, this year’s survey results revealed that average pre-tax profit for the typical ready mixed concrete company has gone down for the third year in a row. This is of vital concern, and helps the association better target training programs and products to help the industry be more successful.

Following is an Executive Summary of the results of the 2003 survey (based on 2002 data). Complete survey results were sent free of charge to NRMCA members that participated in the survey. They are also available for sale to producers only through the NRMCA publications department at 888-846-7622. Please note that the NRMCA Executive Committee voted to raise the cost to non-participating producers considerably this year to encourage participation in the survey. The cost to non-participating NRMCA producer members is $3,000. The cost to non-participating producers that are not members of NRMCA is $5,000.

Complete survey results include data broken down by region, company size, the “typical” NRMCA member and industry leaders (the top 25 percent in profitability). Industry trends and demographics are also outlined in the report.

To participate in this important survey in the future, please look for the 2004 survey forms to be sent in early 2004 for completion by producers. Participating producer members of NRMCA will again receive complete results, along with an individualized company profile, completely free of charge. All individual company data is held strictly confidential by the independent accounting firm that compiles the results. The survey methodology completely complies with all U.S. antitrust laws. Producers are strongly encouraged to participate in this survey for the benefit of their company, as well as the industry as a whole.

For information on how to participate in the 2004 survey, please contact Julie Luther at 240-485-1150.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The 2003 NRMCA Ready Mixed Concrete Industry Data Report is organized as a set of easily referenced industry performance tables. These include the following data aggregations:

- All Reporting Firms
- Industry Leaders — Defined as the 75th percentile and above for companies with the highest profit before taxes per cubic yard (with the 100th percentile being the most profitable).
- NRMCA Member — Defined as the mean (average) of all ready mixed concrete companies participating in the survey.
- Respondents by Sales Volume Size:
  - Under 100 Thousand Yards
  - 100 – 299 Thousand Yards
  - 300 – 500 Thousand Yards
  - Over 500 Thousand Yards
- Respondents by Geographic Region
  (Canadian data converted to $ U.S.)
  - Northeastern/Mid-Atlantic: CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, VA, WV
  - Southeastern: AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN, USVI
  - North Central: IA, MN, NE, ND, SD
  - Central: AR, KS, LA, MO, OK, TX
  - Great Lakes/Midwest: IL, IN, MI, OH, Ontario, WI
  - Rocky Mountain: CO, NM, UT, WY
  - Pacific Northwest: AK, British Columbia, ID, MT, OR, WA
  - Pacific Southwest: AZ, CA, HI, NV

In using this report to evaluate your business performance, you should refer to the set of data comparatives that most closely correspond to your operation. This detailed information should be kept handy and referenced on occasion as a tool for better controlling and managing your business.

The charts and tables in this report were abstracted from the comprehensive set of statistics. This data represents good overall gauges of industry performance in profitability, expense management, inventory management and other key areas.

OVERALL PROFITABILITY

The ratio “net profit before taxes as a percent of sales” is a good overall measure of company profitability. Essentially, this is return on sales or an indication of what bottom line profit return is being earned on net revenue before taxes. For the typical survey participant, this was 2.4 percent in 2002, while industry leaders reported a 6.7 percent return.

PROFIT MODEL

In addition to return on sales, an important component of each NRMCA Ready Mixed Concrete Industry Data Report is a special analysis showing industry profitability based on “return on net worth” (before tax). This single measure essentially summarizes all the key components of profitability: profit management, asset management and financial policy (debt) management.
These charts cover all NRMCA survey participants in the various sales volume and regional categories. These charts are an extremely useful framework in which a company can quickly and easily see which areas of the business need improving. For those companies that participated in the NRMCA Ready Mixed Concrete Industry Data Report, the figures have been calculated and displayed alongside the industry comparatives. The usefulness of these charts is for an individual company wishing to compare its operations with a benchmark or guideline in hope of identifying improvement opportunities.

The easiest way to understand this data is by starting in the middle and working backward. Return on assets is the product of profit and asset turnover. Profit (expressed as a percent of sales) refers to net profit before tax divided by net sales. When asset turnover (net sales divided by total assets) is multiplied by profit, the result is return on assets. Any improvement in your profit or asset turnover will improve the return on assets. Return on net worth is the product of the return on assets and leverage. Leverage, an indicator of the degree to which debt is used for financing, magnifies the return on assets to yield the return on net worth. Given any level of profits, the more debt a company has (or the less net worth), the higher the return on net worth will be.

Note: Typical Yard Profit includes $0.15 in Other Income. Industry Leader Profit includes $0.10 in Other Income.
OTHER IMPORTANT MEASURES

Also included in this report are important employee productivity and efficiency management ratios. The tables below highlight these indicators by industry sales volume groups and by regions.

**TABLE 1: EFFICIENCY RATIOS BY COMPANY SIZE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>&lt;100K</th>
<th>100-299K</th>
<th>300-500K</th>
<th>&gt;500K</th>
<th>Typical</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yds/Hour</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yds/Truck/Yr</td>
<td>3268</td>
<td>4540</td>
<td>5517</td>
<td>5831</td>
<td>5608</td>
<td>5989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales/Employee</td>
<td>154k</td>
<td>194k</td>
<td>208k</td>
<td>233k</td>
<td>228k</td>
<td>241k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VarDel/minute</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2: EFFICIENCY RATIOS BY REGIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>NE/MA</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>GL</th>
<th>RM</th>
<th>PNW</th>
<th>PSW</th>
<th>Typical</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>45.8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yds/Hour</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yds/Truck/Yr</td>
<td>4832</td>
<td>5752</td>
<td>4293</td>
<td>6423</td>
<td>5126</td>
<td>5538</td>
<td>4921</td>
<td>6973</td>
<td>5608</td>
<td>5989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Sales/Employee</td>
<td>236k</td>
<td>223k</td>
<td>137k</td>
<td>217k</td>
<td>204k</td>
<td>317k</td>
<td>194k</td>
<td>290k</td>
<td>228k</td>
<td>241k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VarDel/minute</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In today's tough economic times, the talk about efficiency and company teamwork is ever present. Effective teamwork has to start in areas such as the truck shop, plant maintenance, accounting dispatch, quality control and sales. This is the core or the grassroots of an organization. These departments are there to support and help the mixer drivers who talk with our customers an average of four to five times in one day. To our customers, the drivers are our company. Drivers represent the service after the sale; their effort on the job site is one of the most important aspects of providing good customer service.

So what does all of this have to do with the maintenance shop? Everything! The shop interacts with drivers on a daily basis. Think about it. Have you ever gone to a store to return defective merchandise for repair or replacement and the clerk gives the impression that he is offended that you even have the gall to expect him to come to the counter? When he does come to help, he makes out like you are whining. Basically you get the picture. Well, this is how some drivers feel in the shop, especially when they are relatively new to the job.

Here’s a scenario—a mixer driver notices a problem that needs attention and radios dispatch. Dispatch gives him a hard time for even asking. At the shop, he gets the same treatment. By the time he gets out on the road again, he is feeling quite low because of his perceived stupidity. When he gets to the customer he is mad and upset.

His experience before leaving the plant will most certainly result in poor customer service and all because he cared enough about their truck. The customer gets the brunt of his displeasure because the team members who were supposed to support him failed to treat him in an appropriate manner. “How dare a driver actually come in here during the day and get his truck repaired so he can haul another load? How dare they do that so the company receives payment from the customer so mechanics can get paid and support themselves and their families. How dare them!”

The culture between mechanics and drivers needs to change. Fleet mechanics need to have a positive attitude toward drivers. Everyone in the company is on the same team! And this initiative has to be promoted from the top.

This industry is changing...for the better. With initiatives that started back with the creation of RMC 2000, industry leaders saw a need to better educate their people, clean up our sites and promote concrete to be recognized as the greatest building material known to man. It's time that the people who work for ready mixed concrete companies operate with the mindset that concrete is the building material of choice!

This company culture changes only when leadership insists. Fleet managers have to step up and ensure that drivers and mechanics work together for the good of the company.

Drivers are the maintenance shop's customers, treat them as such. Without them they wouldn't need a shop, would they?

Zagula is director of Technical Services/Aggregates for Metro Ready Mix, Nashville, Tenn., and can be reached at mzagula@mm1.com.
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Denver was the host of NRMCA’s 31st Annual Operations, Environmental and Safety (OES) Forum and Expo in October, 2003. The OES Forum and Expo is an annual NRMCA educational and networking event built around seminars and tours designed specifically for ready mixed concrete fleet, plant, safety and environmental professionals. Attendees of the event were treated to a very special tour of the world’s largest recycling project, the Stapleton Airport Renovation in Denver, Colorado.

Denver’s Stapleton International Airport opened its doors in 1929 and by the time it closed 66 years later, it had become one of the busiest airports in the United States. In 1995, it was replaced by the new state-of-the-art Denver International Airport.

With the new airport built in a completely different location, Denver officials were left with the challenge of revitalizing the massive Stapleton Airport complex. Plans gradually evolved to redevelop this valuable land into a “city within a city” to include homes, businesses, educational facilities and beautiful open space.
Before that could happen, however, something had to be done with the existing infrastructure. Recycled Materials Company, Inc. (RMCI) President Mark Wachal became involved in preliminary project planning in 1993 and finally received the go ahead in 1999. RMCI is charged with the task of cleaning up one of the nation’s largest brown-field sites and making constructive use of the materials removed and the land left behind.

Since August 1999, RMCI has been operating at Stapleton under a permit that allows exclusive access and removal rights of on-site aggregates. Under terms of its contract with the Colorado Department of Aviation, RMCI has six years to remove concrete runways and taxiways, averaging 24-inches thick and covering 975 acres. When the dust settles, 6 million tons of crushed concrete aggregate will be recycled, marketed and consumed.

Products resulting from the operation at Stapleton range from sand to “staple stone,” which are large concrete blocks suitable for retention walls, barriers and other landscaping projects. In fact, studies performed by the Colorado School of Mines find that the recycled product coming from Stapleton can be equal to or of higher quality than virgin materials. Aggregates generated from the Stapleton site frequently return to high-end end uses such as new ready mixed concrete and hot mix asphalt. RMCI is under contract with the United States government to provide Biota encapsulation material that will aid in the environmental cleanup of Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Denver.

On Stapleton’s northern border, the community’s extensive bike and trail system will link into the 17,000-acre Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

By recycling, Denver will use what would otherwise become a waste product filling landfills and disposal spaces. Since this operation stays on site at the former airport (the product is recycled and stockpiled on site), there are minimal hauling costs for this superior recycled product. Better yet, on-site recycling saves wear on trucks and reduces time workers have to be deal with traffic congestion. Finally, as Wachal explains, RMCI’s project at Stapleton “produces recycled aggregate that saves or extends the life of other aggregates and raw material sources.”

NRMCA member Aggregate Industries’ West Central Region negotiated an agreement with RMCI to allow the operation of an asphalt and ready mixed concrete plant on the Stapleton site.

Under a 10-year agreement, Aggregate Industries has the exclusive right to produce asphalt and ready mixed concrete at sites under permit to RMCI, to handle recycling operations at the massive Stapleton Airport redevelopment and in the high growth southeast quadrant of Denver. The agreement also enables Aggregate Industries to use recycled aggregates generated from the Stapleton project.

Aggregate Industries’ size in the region and its integrated ready mixed concrete and asphalt operations made it an attractive partner for RMCI, given its potential to consume a significant portion of the recycled materials. This is especially critical given the massive size of the Stapleton Airport redevelopment. It is anticipated that Recycled Materials will recycle between 5 million and 5.5 million tons of
debris over the next 10 years at the Stapleton site. Aggregate Industries’ officials estimate that the company will consume at least half of that material, perhaps even more, depending on market conditions.

When completed, the 4,700-acre (7.5-square-mile) area located 10 minutes east of downtown Denver will consist of a “tapestry” of homes, shops, offices and parks. In 30 years’ time it is expected that the new Stapleton community will consist of 12,000 homes, 10 million square feet of offices, 3 million square feet of shopping and more than 1,100 acres of parks and open space. The community will house 30,000 residents and more than 35,000 workers.

Parks and open space define many of Denver’s great neighborhoods. Washington Park, Cheesman Park, Congress Park, City Park and many others are grand public spaces that are part of Denver’s legacy. Stapleton will build on that tradition, devoting nearly 30 percent of its 4,700 acres to parks and open space, increasing the size of the Denver Park system by more than 25 percent.

The centerpiece of Stapleton’s 1,116-acre regional park system will be the 80-acre “Central Park,” which will consume much of the recycled materials. Bikeways and paths, similar to those found along Denver’s Cherry Creek, will grace Stapleton’s Sand Creek and Westerly Creek Greenways. On Stapleton’s northern border, the community’s extensive bike and trail system will link into the 17,000-acre Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

Parks and open space already exist. The 123-acre Bluff Lake Nature Center and the 23-acre Urban Farm at Stapleton regularly host urban school children yearning for knowledge about nature and the country life. The 30-acre Fred Thomas Park always finds local residents picnicking or playing soccer. The Bladium Sports Club, formerly one of the Stapleton Airport hangers, offers two in-line skating rinks as well as extensive exercise opportunities.

When all is completed, Stapleton will be a model for future generations to follow on how concrete can be recycled and used in many different applications. In fact, at the present time, another community is watching the Stapleton Project very closely. Irvine, Calif., city officials are learning some lessons from Denver in transforming the old El Toro Marine Corps base into Great Park. Denver is about five years ahead of Irvine in the process of turning blueprints into reality. The Great Park plan outlines a combination of 3,400 homes, 4,000 acres of open space, 28 acres for commercial use and 800 housing units for seniors.

At 4,700 acres, Stapleton Airport is the same size as the former El Toro military base, has just a tad more acreage under concrete (1,000) and faced the same pollution concerns of decades of leaked fuels and solvents. How Denver is treating those problems offers some ideas for how Irvine might deal with similar issues.

Information for this article was obtained from Recycled Materials Company Incorporated, Aggregate Industries, City of Denver and the City of Irvine.
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Buying or Selling a Concrete Plant: What You Need to Know About Environmental Due Diligence


It's common knowledge that environmental liabilities can cost a bundle in today's world of strict regulations and government oversight. Conditions such as underground storage tanks, contaminated septic fields, petroleum contaminated soil or groundwater, or any other environmental hazard can turn an industrial property like a concrete plant into a problem that either can't be sold or may not be worth buying. Or worse, these problems may be discovered after you've bought that plant or company, only to discover that now you may be required to clean up an environmental hazard that a prior owner caused. Any of these conditions can result in large outlays of capital to correct the condition, and if unplanned, can turn that promising deal into an environmental horror story quicker than just about anything else.

How does a potential buyer of a concrete plant take steps to prevent this disaster? By conducting environmental due diligence prior to the sale. In the context of environmental matters, due diligence is an appropriate inquiry into previous ownership and uses of a property, particularly as they relate to conditions or activities that may impact the environment. To a potential buyer of a concrete plant, it means a prudent investigation of actual or potential known or suspected environmental hazards, typically conducted by an impartial third party, before the sale.

Indeed, Federal CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act) regulations provide a measure of defense for a responsible party (the landowner) should an environmental condition be discovered after the sale and in the event that the condition must be remediated — but only if an appropriate level of environmental due diligence was conducted before the sale. This concept, called the “innocent landowner defense,” establishes protection against CERCLA liability if the property was acquired after a hazardous substance was disposed of on a property, and at the time of acquisition the owner

Environmental due diligence is also highly advisable to a seller of a concrete plant before putting the plant on the market.
“did not know and had no reason to know” that the hazardous substance was disposed of on the property. The current owner of that plant site can demonstrate that they had “no reason to know” only if they conducted appropriate due diligence prior to acquisition.

The common due diligence documentation is known as a “Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA),” which requires a thorough evaluation of location, site activities, historical uses and visible environmental concerns, all toward the goal of evaluating any known or suspected/potential environmental conditions. A Phase I ESA should be conducted in accordance with established ASTM standards, which were created to establish good site assessment practices that satisfy the due diligence responsibilities of participants in real estate transactions. Should a situation be uncovered that warrants further investigation, a “Phase II ESA” is conducted, with a third phase possible should remediation activities be warranted.

But who should perform due diligence? Your best bet is to use an unbiased (i.e., unconnected to either party in the transaction), knowledgeable and trained third party to conduct due diligence. Usually, this is a qualified environmental consultant. How about conducting the due diligence yourself (“in-house”) in an effort to control costs or “keep the deal confidential”? This is usually not a good idea for several reasons. First, you lose that “unbiased” nature — sometimes insiders are pressured not to pass up that great deal, regardless of environmental hazards. Second, you should always strive to ensure that your third-party dealings (particularly results) are done on a strictly confidential basis (you may wish to consider a confidential agreement). Third, it is the rare concrete company that has the type of specialized expertise in-house — you are better off leaving this service to an expert. Fourth, you may lose a measure of defense should you wish to utilize the “innocent landowner defense” under CERCLA or to pursue legal action for uncovered environmental conditions found after the sale. Fifth, most banks or finance companies require third-party due diligence, as do many shareholder /stockholder accountability concerns of publicly held companies. Lastly, the capital spent on due diligence is money well spent compared to the skyrocketing costs of environmental remediation or legal fees.

You may wish to consider hiring a consultant with knowledge of the concrete industry for due diligence services. In this way, not only do the “traditional” areas of due diligence get evaluated, but also those “concrete-oriented” environmental concerns (e.g., process water and returned concrete management) that can cost a small fortune to fix down the road.

Environmental due diligence is also highly advisable to a seller of a concrete plant before putting the plant on the market. Due diligence activities can help you uncover and correct environmental conditions that might otherwise affect the eventual sales price or even result in legal action (always consult legal counsel before conducting due diligence).

For whatever reason chosen, environmental due diligence prior to the purchase or sale of a concrete plant is not only a necessity today, it’s also money well spent.

Rublin may be reached at P.O. Box 512, Forked River, NJ 08731 or by calling 609-693-8301.
Safety Metrics and What They Mean in Our Industry

Each year NRMCA reports a survey that details combined incidence rates of companies responding to a request for information that is taken directly from the OSHA 300A summary log. NRMCA staff compiles the data into one comprehensive report that gives a snapshot of the membership’s safety performance as measured by commonly accepted safety metrics.

The 2003 NRMCA safety statistics benchmarking survey showed a 38-percent increase in the number of employee hours over the previous years’ entries. Respondents submitted more than 52.7 million employee hours, up from the previous year’s survey of 38.3 million hours. Forty-three companies participated in the data collection.

The 43 companies that participated were divided into four categories: less than 100,000 employee hours, 100,000 – 1 million hours, 1 million – 5 million hours and more than 5 million employee hours. For comparison, this year’s survey includes four important safety statistics collected and published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for standard industrial classification code 3273, which is ready mixed concrete. Total case incidence rate, lost days incidence rate, recordables incidence rate, and the medical case incidence rate are separated in the following table that details industry statistics. However, the BLS numbers are from calendar year 2001, which is the most recent year for which data is available.

In addition to the case incidence rate, the severity rate for each company category is included in the analysis. Along with the number of employee hours, number of injuries/illnesses, lost work days and restricted duty workdays, the severity rate illustrates a membership (based on respondents) that fares better than the overall ready mixed concrete industry in the U.S. With the exception of one category, all major statistical safety performance methods show that NRMCA members collectively perform better when compared to the BLS published data. (The combined lost days incidence rate for companies reporting less than 100,000 employee hours is 4.2, compared with the BLS rate of 4.0.)

The 2003 survey asked respondents to report four types of employee incidents: struck by, strains/sprains, same level fall and different level falls. This expanded question line provides guidance to NRMCA and its membership in strategizing training needs for the industry. Struck by injuries and strains and sprains accounted for the majority of incident types.

Next year NRMCA will report more “upstream measurements” in the survey to illustrate practical applications to prevent incidents from occurring. Measuring the number of safety and health activities is one way companies can share data and instead of reporting on safety performance after an incident occurred companies will give an account of activities they engaged in to prevent injuries and illnesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Employee Hours</th>
<th>Category by Company Size</th>
<th>Number of Injuries/Illnesses</th>
<th>Number of Lost Workdays</th>
<th>Number of Lost Workday Injuries/Illnesses</th>
<th>Number of Lost Workday and Restricted Duty Injuries/Illnesses</th>
<th>Total Case Incidence Rate (TCIR)</th>
<th>Fatality Rate</th>
<th>Lost Days Incidence Rate</th>
<th>Recordables Incidence Rate</th>
<th>Medical Case Incidence Rate</th>
<th>Severity Rate</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>52,710,190</td>
<td>All Industry Data</td>
<td>1,580</td>
<td>10,820</td>
<td>334</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<td>Not available</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Lost work day injuries and illnesses are those cases where the individual employee was away from work for one day or more excluding the day of injury.
2 Restricted duty injuries/illnesses occur when an employee cannot perform his/her normal work activities for one day or more excluding the day of injury.
3 The total case incidence rate is calculated by summing fatalities, lost day injuries/illnesses, restricted duty injuries/illnesses and medical cases, multiplying by 200,000, and then dividing by employee hours for the period of time, in this case for calendar year 2002.
4 Fatality Rate = (# of fatalities)(200,000)/employee hours, in this case for calendar year 2002.
5 Lost Time Incidence Rate = (# of injuries/illnesses that incurred lost days)(200,000)/employee hours, in this case for calendar year 2002.
6 Recordables Incidence Rate = (# of injuries/illnesses that occurred in restricted duty/job transfer)(200,000)/employee hours, in this case for calendar year 2002.
7 Medical Case Incidence Rate = (# of cases that required professional medical attention with no lost days or restricted duty)(200,000)
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For better or worse, the mixer truck driver is a public face of the ready mixed producer, report contractors who’ve had the good, bad and indifferent pull up to their construction sites over the years. To a man, they said they never questioned drivers’ technical expertise, saying they believe a producer has adequately trained them to be professional drivers. But they sometimes wonder whether the training stopped at the technical aspects of the job. The so-called people skills are valued very highly, these contractors said.

“One of the most important parts is their preparation,” he said. “Cooperation is a big thing too.”

Fisher expressed annoyance at those drivers who wait until the last minute to climb from their cabs to begin unhinging their chutes and other pre-pour tasks. He said he used to work in the field himself, directing traffic and performing the many other coordinating tasks needed for a smooth pour and knew how crucial it is to be ready with one’s truck.

He said he couldn’t recall any driver-related disaster stories, but did remember the one driver who was unable to drive his truck to the pour location, blamed it on Fisher’s men and proceeded to call the dispatcher’s office to tell all about the troubles he was having. Fortunately, in Fisher’s mind, the good driver stories have far outweighed the bad in Woodland’s 16-year history.

“I remember a 20-year veteran, a big older guy, who shook my hand one time and thanked me for the job (he had done on Wood-

land sites many years before),” Fisher said. “I’ll never forget that. It’s a tough job, busy as everything is down here,” he added, describing the congestion of South Florida and the often difficult sites a driver must negotiate to get a job done.

Ready mixed executives responsible for hiring and training drivers say comments from contractors such as Ruttura and Fisher do not go unheard. Redmond, Wash.-based Gwyn Hart of Cadman said attitude is the first key attribute her company seeks.

“We work really, really hard at creating that customer focus,” Hart said. “We have guys who help homeowners finish their slabs on Saturday morning.”

She said Cadman, which averages about 130 drivers for its fleet, obviously also places a high priority on technical skill, emphasizing in training class that drivers are carrying a perishable product. Drivers are placed in a dispatchers’ office for at least a half day so they can see “what kind of a pressure cooker it can be sometimes,” Hart said. They’re then sent into the field with an experienced driver for about three days before going out on their own. The extensive training and pre-hiring screening does have its benefits, she added.

“We don’t get too many driver-related mistakes,” Hart said.

Neither does Gary Reisner, human resource manager for Standard Concrete in Santa Anna, Calif. The West Coast producer employs about 225 drivers at a given time to cover a four-county area that
includes a wide swath of metropolitan Los Angeles. He repeated Hart’s comments about what to look for in hiring mixer drivers.

“Attitude is number one,” Reisner said, adding that proper training can enhance their technical skills.

He said dealing with high turnover and the most effective ways to find and hire capable drivers is always a challenge, but it’s a challenge that Standard Concrete meets way more often than not.

“We get lots of compliments on our drivers,” Reisner said.

Sometimes negative comments are made because feelings are bruised at a hectic job site, he said. Many times laborers give mixer drivers a hard time for any number of reasons and drivers, being frustrated in arriving at a difficult pour site, battling traffic, etc., give it right back. Nevertheless, Standard follows up on all complaints.

Gary Burleson, president and CEO of Phoenix-based BBP Construction Company, doesn’t have many complaints about the drivers who arrive on his sites throughout Arizona. Despite much tighter scheduling over the years, sites where “everyone is kind of on top of each other” and mixer trucks having to negotiate the most challenging of pour sites, drivers have met the challenge, he said.

The success of any pour is having a driver who’s informed, Burleson said, with communication among the dispatcher, driver and contractor the most important factor when considering how successfully these 60,000-pound vehicles enter and leave the construction site.

“You give special instructions to the dispatcher, wash out location, location of job, safety precautions, strobes only, no backup alarms, that sort of thing,” he said. “A lot of times it’s an education type thing. The QC didn’t inform the driver.”

Next thing you know, the police are issuing a citation in the predawn hours to a truck that inadvertently tripped an alarm because it failed to use the proper entrance to the site, Burleson explained. Or a driver who sometimes likes to anticipate what you need instead of paying close attention to the person at the opposite end of the truck who is manipulating the chutes.

“You watch the hand signals,” stressed Burleson, adding that arms can be lost when safety is compromised at the end of a pour just before the truck is about to leave. “Just follow the instructions at the end.”
Wear and tear on the aggregate handling system of a ready mixed concrete facility costs concrete producers thousands of dollars annually. Added to these costs are the dollars lost in revenue for plant “down time” when these systems need repair. Most companies who manage, track and keep these costs to a minimum all have one thing in common... a good preventive maintenance plan for the aggregate handling system.

Whether the aggregate handling system is large or small, new or old, tunnel or above grade, all need a good maintenance program. Like any other piece of equipment, without proper maintenance, the system can be a liability rather than an asset. Maintenance influences the entire operation, from product quality to on-time delivery.

Good preventive maintenance plans start with daily, weekly, monthly and annual inspections. Ensure belts are tracking correctly and have no cuts or tears. Rips or rupatures may be the result of excessive amount of material on the belt or from the relative loading velocity being too high or too low. Adjust chutes, gates or belt speed and then closely observe the operations. Belts will ride differently when loaded and unloaded. “Training the belts” is accomplished by adjusting the take-up toward one side or the other. In a tunnel, materials can build up under the belt and cause the belt to slip, stain or tear. Always keep the tunnel cleaned out. Belt wipers must be checked for proper adjustment. Excessive buildup will occur if the wiper is not in the proper place.

The electrical system takes a beating from all the vibration of everyday use. Check all motor mounts and electrical connections for wear. Make sure lubrication of all rollers is scheduled weekly or monthly. Lack of lubrication can cause rollers to “freeze up” and grab and tear belt laces. Counterweights are generally used in tunnels or very long belt spans where proper tension of the belt is difficult to achieve. These counterweights should be kept clean and well lubricated. Make sure all safety equipment works properly, including pull cords and guards. All catwalks should be kept free of debris.

Finally, the best preventive maintenance plan won’t be worth the paper it’s written on without well-trained personnel. Maintenance can be dirty and labor intensive. It does not have to be “thank-less.” Makes sure your maintenance people are recognized for the important part they play in the successful operations of a ready mixed concrete production facility.
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A fact of life in the ready mixed concrete industry is that when steel revolving drum mixers deliver concrete, they will eventually develop built-up concrete inside the mixing drum. This buildup chokes the mixing drums, detracts from its ability to mix and reduces delivery capacity. It has been standard operating procedure for a chipper to enter the drum, use a jackhammer and compressor to remove the buildup and return the truck to service. The operating procedure in the industry, however, has been changed in recent years. State and federal agencies have developed important regulations to protect the safety and health of our employees and communities. These regulations, however, add a new complexity to the ready mixed concrete industry.

Whether an in-house crew, a driver or a professional chipping crew is hired, the removal of buildup has traditionally been handled the same way. The trucks are driven to a remote spot and turned off. The chipper squeezes into the drum through a hatch that is typically 18- to 24-inch square and enters into a 360-degree enclosed environment. Even with a locked out-tagged out drum and permit-required confined spaces protocols, the chipper must be careful. One danger to the chipper in the drum is falling concrete. Even when the chipper is careful about the correct chipping angles, the jackhammer causes vibration in the drum, which in turn can cause concrete overhead to loosen and fall. Once the buildup in the accessible and safe areas (shoulder level and below) has been removed, the chipper must get out of the drum, remove lock out devices, rotate the drum, complete the lock out-tag out procedure again, and then re-enter the drum to continue chipping. It is very tempting to take a shortcut and chip at an unsafe angle as those with scars and bruises can attest. This practice must be avoided. As the work continues, dust will be created. The mixer must be properly vented and the chipper must use proper personal protective equipment (dust mask or respirator).

OSHA has regulations to cover four typical areas of operational procedures. These regulations include lock-out/tag-out, confined space entry, personal protective equipment (PPE) and airborne particulates (respiratory protection).

Lock Out/Tag Out

Without properly locking out the truck and drum, stored energy or the careless intervention by a co-worker could allow the drum to move, possibly injuring the chipper or others nearby. In
summary, OSHA requires that all energy sources be identified and a plan be developed, documented and implemented to prevent the release of energy. In the case of chipping, this means the truck’s battery cable has been removed, locked and tagged out and the mixer drum’s hydraulics have been disconnected. The drum itself is blocked, wedged or strapped from both directions to prevent the truck or the drum from moving.

Confined Spaces

As stated previously, the ready mixed concrete truck is typically driven to a remote location for the chipping process. The chipper enters a hatch measuring between 18- and 24-inch square. Once inside the drum, the chipper is effectively isolated from a normal workplace. The job of chipping the drum is labor intensive and the chipper must be safety conscious at all times. There are many ways for a chipper to be injured. Even with a spotter, there are significant logistical problems to removing an injured chipper from a drum with a 24-inch hatch and piles of loosened concrete debris.

OSHA requires that confined space entries be identified. A mixer drum is a “permit required confined space” if all hazards cannot be removed. If the mixer is assessed to be “permit required,” a plan must be developed, documented and implemented to provide for a supervisor to manage the entry process, a qualified person to enter the confined space and an attendant to watch for dangerous situations and the safety of the operator. This particular “permit required confined space” must also have the atmosphere sampled periodically and recorded on the permit. Adherence to this regulation must be documented.

Airborne Particulates

The airborne dust created by chipping is easily inhaled, even through a common dust mask. The chipper in the drum may not be the only one exposed to the airborne particles. It also is possible for individuals outside the drum to be exposed to elevated levels of airborne particles. In summary, OSHA requires that levels of airborne particles be monitored and recorded, appropriate respiratory protective equipment be worn, and procedures be developed, documented and implemented to prevent exposure to OSHA-defined dangerous levels of airborne particles.

Records must show that airborne particle levels have been monitored with an atmospheric sampling device and corrective actions taken if necessary.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Shorts and t-shirts cannot be found in OSHA’s manual as proper PPE for jackhammering concrete from mixer drums. There are a couple good practices we can suggest that OSHA does approve of, including rugged denim jeans, long sleeve shirt or Kevlar sleeves, steel-toe work boots, hard hat, hearing protection, Tyvek suit, and full-face respirators or half-face respirators with wrap-around eye protection. Anti-vibration gloves are recommended for persons using a jackhammer for extended periods of time.

By understanding the applicable regulations and carefully planning and documenting the process, it is possible to efficiently and effectively remove built-up concrete from the ready mixed concrete mixer drums while meeting all regulatory requirements. The concrete producer must compare the
current processes with the applicable regulations and identify the deficient areas. New procedures must then be developed, documented and implemented to address any deficiencies.

Some producers choose to train employees in house to comply with regulations and company requirements while others select professional chipping crews who abide by the same requirements. When choosing a professional chipping crew, the producer must ensure that correct procedures and documentation are complete and available and all operators have been trained. OSHA has been known to request confined space papers during inspections.

Procedures will be defined, documented and followed for all aspects of the lock out-tag out requirements. For example, truck tires will be chocked. Truck keys will be removed and stored outside the truck. The drum will be locked or restrained to prevent rotation. Permit-required confined space papers will be generated, the atmosphere inside the drum will be sampled and PPE will be donned. After controlled rotation of the drum to facilitate the chipping process, the entire lock out-tag out procedure will be followed again to prevent further rotation. Safety cones will be placed in the vicinity of the truck to ensure proper caution is observed by other people in the area.

A ventilation system will be utilized during chipping. Each individual in the immediate region of the drum will be wearing OSHA-approved personal protective equipment appropriate to the airborne particle size and concentration. The concentration of airborne particulates will be monitored and recorded. Any out-of-control situations will be noted and corrected.

In permit-required situations, a minimum of three people will perform the concrete abatement. One person will act as chipper (entrant) and enter the drum. A second person will be a spotter (attendant) who watches the chipper and monitors the airborne particle concentrations, and a third person will be the supervisor responsible for monitoring the entrant, attendant and all protocols. Should the chipper get injured, the spotter will immediately follow the predefined safety procedures to get the chipper necessary attention, first aid or medical care. The supervisor is responsible for completing required process documentation and demonstrating conformance to regulations.

To date, concrete buildup in an active ready mixed concrete drum is a problematic issue for the industry. The time-honored technique for concrete removal using a jackhammer and compressor is still the most common method. Today, however, producers must ensure their abatement procedures include processes to ensure employee and community safety and health, as required by OSHA. With adequate preparation, planning and training the process of chipping can be as efficient as always with the added benefit of improved safety.

Eric Hildreth is with Impact Technologies, Inc. and can be reached at 937-539-8055.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association.
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Let’s get one thing straight — altruistic thoughts are fine and dandy, but if you want to give away your time, talent and materials, you better operate in the black, not red. Burlington, Wisc.-based Alby Materials understands the basic business premise that profitable companies can more easily afford extensive philanthropic activities than firms that struggle each year to yield acceptable profits.

From its start in 1969 by the late Ron Alby, Alby Materials has tried to be a good corporate citizen in an industry that has seen its share of community-based opposition. The firm is active in trade and business associations and serves on numerous ad hoc community committees while providing materials, services, people and funding for various local and statewide efforts. After all, as second-generation Owner/President Terry Alby pointed out, when you’re giving back to the community, you’re essentially giving back to the residents who are buying your products and enabling you to earn a living. “Because we are profitable, we’re able to act as good corporate citizens,” he said.
Alby clearly places his employees and materials where his mouth is. The company’s community involvement includes active members of the Burlington, East Troy, Elkhorn and Waterford chambers of commerce. It also makes it a point to participate in community events such as parades, touch-a-truck programs and the Burlington Wheel Rally. Alby Materials also provides materials, services, clerical support and/or funding for such programs as Habitat for Humanity of Walworth County.

The company is very active in school-to-work initiatives, including participating in career days and career fairs, providing student internships, supporting the Junior Achievement curriculum at Waterford Union High School and providing materials and expertise for area industrial arts education. And there’s more, Alby added. Alby materials assists in planning and implementing the annual Wisconsin Construction Career Connection, supports the Walworth County Building Trades Academy, helps out on the annual Waterford Athletic Club Golf Outing and sponsors the annual Ron Alby Scholarship.

Each fall, Alby Materials’ Waterford Aggregate Division plays host to about 150 sixth-grade students from the Waterford Graded School District, providing both classroom and in-field instruction about the great Ice Age and its effect on the Waterford/Rochester area. Throughout the school year, Alby Materials also sponsors Everything Comes from Something, a free, interactive adventure in natural resource education.

All this philanthropic activity is a far cry from the early 1970s when Ron Alby started mining his Waterford site and put in wash plants. In 1977, he built a second ready mixed plant in Elkhorn. Currently, Alby Materials serves much of Southeastern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois, producing and supplying landscape materials, sands, gravels and topsoil. In fact, Alby aggregates helped build the Great American amusement park in suburban Minneapolis along with a water pond at one of Michael Jordan’s homes.

In the last decade, Terry Alby said the company also has moved heavily into recycling construction materials, giving a second life to concrete rubble that is now sold to contractors for use as road base. Further expansion occurred this year when Alby Rents, LLC, opened for business, carrying equipment for builders and contractors, including mini excavators, Bobcats, portable lights, concrete saws and demolition equipment.

“Our company success was founded on two rules of conduct,” Alby said in a statement that was posted on the company Web site. “First, produce and provide quality products and services. Second, invest in customers and meet their needs through efficient and innovative use of people, equipment and technology.”

Such corporate goals have yielded results over the 34-year history of Alby Materials. In addition to a number of industry awards, including a 2000 Excellence in Training Award from NRMCA, Alby was honored with a People’s Choice Award for the 1997 Burlington Wheel Rally and a Community Commitment Award, given by the Waterford Graded School District Board of Education for “meritorious involvement” in the construction of the Evergreen Elementary School.
As the economy forces ready mixed producers to tighten training budgets, it is more important than ever to not only strike the best deal but also forge a working relationship with a trainer supplier.

Negotiating With a Trainer Supplier

Today’s savvy ready mixed producers demand training expenditures procure a return on their investment. They have also added another element to the contract: they wisely protect and enhance their relationship with training contractors throughout the service process. In the past, negotiation-for-services just focused on what price the producer was willing to pay a training consultant. The goal focused on securing training, not necessarily holding employees or trainers accountable for new skills implementation after training is completed. Securing a contract focused on haggling the fee. With today’s more sophisticated business paradigms, executives know a “deal” must be more expansive. While the contract must satisfy company objectives, it must also maintain good will with the training vendor, the business community and the public. The American Society for Training and Development ASTD shares a few tips when contracting for training services:

Before negotiating, identify what is in your and your vendor’s best interests.

Before you meet with a prospective training consultant, determine the results that are in your best interest, as well as the financial position you will take at the negotiating table to obtain the desired outcome. And while at it, guess what your negotiating counterpart’s interests might be (realizing you might be wrong). To obtain your goal, the outcome should focus on procuring and implementing skills that employees use to build a stronger business, not just keeping the training expense within budget.

Begin the dialogue with mutually shared interests (the outcomes you both want, such as a successful training session). Starting on a positive note helps build rapport and momentum in the negotiation. Then take the negotiation to the next process and discuss your parameters. For example, you determine that the topic is phone skills training, your budget is a maximum of $100,000, and you want hold classes on Saturdays and Sundays.

While companies have no problem sharing their training parameters, many are reluctant to share the dollar amount because they feel it will weaken their bargaining position. On the contrary, research shows that those companies that share all the facts, including constraints and financial parameters up front, get better end results. The full picture allows prospective trainers to present a solution within your guidelines. Different vendors will present different solutions within your boundaries, giving you the chance to choose the one that best serves your needs. ASTD believes that just a fee-centered dialog limits creative solutions, which in the end costs more than the money saved.
Increasing Opportunities for the Ready Mixed Concrete Industry

NRMCA is committed to helping its members increase their share of the construction market. Our goal is to make concrete the construction material of choice. With our National Accounts Program we are creating new opportunities for our members. Our advocacy initiatives ensure that the ready mixed industry's views are represented before the White House, Congress and Federal regulatory bodies. For additional information on all of these programs and others, please visit our website at www.nrmca.org or call us at 1-888-84NRMCA.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

JAN 20-23  NRMCA CCSP MODULE IV - LAS VEGAS, NV
JAN 27 - 30  NRMCA CCSP MODULE II - UNDERSTANDING THE CONTRACTOR'S BUSINESS, LANSING, MI
FEB 17 - 20  NRMCA CCSP MODULE 1 - CONCRETE 101, SILVER SPRING, MD
FEB 24 - 26  NRMCA DISPATCHER TRAINING FORUM, PHOENIX, AZ

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Understand your alternatives/options before negotiation and exhaust them during negotiation. Even if the training is a high priority, figuring out options and your walk-away point gives you freedom at the table. For example, once you start laying out your parameters to prospective vendors, you might find it can’t be done, so an alternative plan must be considered. Rather than train many, perhaps train a few. One way would be to hire a trainer for a train-the-trainer course and then do internal training. Or send a few employees to classes elsewhere while you look for a better training solution than the one stalematized at the negotiation table. It’s OK to float your options at the table. Bidders’ responses to your alternatives, positive or negative, might disclose what is important to their firm and the direction you need to ultimately reach agreement.

Once commonality is established, address differing interests by trading one for another. Once movement is made in the right direction, continue to uncover a training firm’s underlying interests. Perhaps a consultant asks that you share names and contact information from other companies who might be interested in similar training, and in return, for any business procured from the list, your firm would receive a volume discount on training fees. Another trainer might be willing to travel to your various locations, thereby cutting your staff participation costs in time and money. In return for the trainer’s consideration, they would like you to endorse their services, if you are ultimately satisfied. Those items financially cost nothing but can have a high value for a vendor.

Determine what’s fair for both parties. Ready mixed producers know the business environment when negotiating a purchase of vehicles or materials, but when it comes to training consultants and intellectual capital, producers feel they have less leverage because the territory is not familiar. As the buyer, you must first ascertain the standards of the training arena’s legitimacy to determine what their offer should be to you. For example, once you have determined that a specific trainer seems to be of high quality and meets your needs, their quote could be $125,000 for the course when your budget is $100,000. Imagine how empowered you’d feel if you could let the consultant know that you are troubled by his bid, because based on research for this type of training, the market price ranges from $75,000 to $100,000, plus travel expenses. Asking him to explain why his course fees are higher than his industry’s average puts you in a better position to decide. Your insight certainly will open up a dialog between the two of you. There might be good reasons for the $125,000 bid and the new information might affect your interpretation of the bid and your decision. But more often than not, the vendor will find that highballing is futile and lowering the price could win your business.

When you reach agreement, continue to think creatively about how to expand the pie. Introduce more options that enhance the deal for at least one side. That leads to stronger relationships and better terms in the future.

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HOW to Structure an Internship Opportunity

Providing an internship opportunity within your company is a great opportunity for both you as an employer and for students who are pursuing a career in the concrete or construction industry.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR THE COMPANY?

Offering an internship to a qualified student provides companies with a great worker recruitment advantage. Students who intern and have a good experience with a company are much more likely to seek employment from that company upon graduation. It is also a terrific way for the company to evaluate the student’s abilities and fit within the company before committing to hire the individual as a full-time employee. In addition, an intern can be a great and inexpensive supplement to your existing workforce, especially during the busy construction season.
WHAT’S IN IT FOR THE STUDENT?

Students gain valuable experience in the industry through an internship. This helps them make decisions about their potential career and can provide an advantage over their peers as they search for employment upon graduation. Additionally, many educational programs, such as the Concrete Industry Management (CIM) program at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), now require at least one internship experience to fulfill graduation requirements.

HOW DOES A COMPANY STRUCTURE AN INTERNSHIP?

Here are some guidelines for companies to follow when structuring an internship:

Types of Internships – There are several types of internships, and companies have flexibility in terms of the length and time of year in which they offer an internship opportunity. Most students will be interested in a summer internship. These typically will last two months but can be tailored to the schedule of the company or the potential intern. Some students may wish to take a semester off school to intern, which means that internships can be offered year-round. Local students may be interested in a part-time internship where they work at a company around their school schedule. For the CIM program, students must work 100 hours in an internship to fulfill requirements for three credits toward graduation.

Compensation – You can choose to offer either a paid or unpaid internship. Some students may be willing to take an unpaid internship just to gain valuable experience. Keep in mind that unpaid internships can certainly become more attractive if you agree to pay for housing and commuting costs. Paid internships that provide housing tend to lure the most experienced and marketable intern candidates. An informal poll of summer 2003 CIM program interns revealed a range of $10 to $15 per hour was offered by most companies. Some companies have chosen instead to offer a stipend to interns – either on a monthly basis or to cover the course of the internship.

The decision on how to compensate the intern is entirely up to the company and will depend on economic conditions, the experience and qualifications of the potential intern and the type of work the intern will be performing. When determining if you can provide compensation to your intern, consider your company’s typical recruitment costs, as well as what you would have to pay full-time employees to cover the work you intend to have performed by your intern. It may be that the internship effectively pays for itself by reducing your costs in other areas.

Housing – Housing is one of the most important facets of an internship arrangement. If the student is not from your local area, he or she will likely need some help in finding suitable housing for the course of the internship. While it is not required that your company pay for housing, it is certainly an attraction to students if you are willing to pay for housing, and it allows you to draw from a larger pool of potential interns. In any event, locating affordable and suitable housing for your intern is likely to be necessary. Many interns will be living in a place far from home during their internships and will not be familiar with the area.

If you are responsible for finding your intern(s) housing, consider area crime rates, accessibility to goods and services, and commuting times to and from work when evaluating housing options. You will need to know if your intern will have a car or if mass transit is available to and from their housing and work locations.

Potential sources of housing include:

• Colleges and universities often rent out dormitory rooms not being occupied by full-time students. In many cases, this will be your most cost-effective option and can provide a built-in social network for your intern.
• Some apartment buildings offer short-term leases, especially in transient areas.
• Many hotel chains now offer suite accommodations rented by the week – generally geared toward business travelers.

Remember, your intern could be a future employee, customer, supplier or competitor.

Consider teaming up with your competitors. If several companies in a local area are each hosting interns, you may be able to rent a house or multi-room apartment to house your interns together at a shared expense. This also facilitates networking for the students.

In larger cities that are accustomed to hosting summer interns, such as Washington, D.C., there may be special residencies set up to serve this purpose that can be found on a housing Web site or by requesting a city housing guide from your local chamber of commerce.

Please note that a big help in finding available temporary housing is starting early – such as three to six months in advance. Housing opportunities can evaporate quickly, especially in high-demand areas.

If the intern is responsible for securing housing, you should be available to answer questions and provide area information as mentioned above. Interns living a distance away may not be able to make an initial trip to investigate housing options. You can offer to evaluate their potential dwellings to make certain that they are as good as advertised and provide a suitable atmosphere.

Professional Conduct – Be sure to provide your intern with a copy of an employee or specialized intern handbook well in advance of the intern’s move to your company’s area. This will help the intern prepare for daily life on the job, including the dress code, hours of company operation and any other requirements or expectations of employment. Please also be available to answer any questions the intern might have.

Your Intern on the Job – It is important that you communicate with your potential intern in advance of the internship to be clear about both your and his or her expectations. Ask your intern if there are particular areas of the business in which he or she would like to focus. If the intern is unsure about which area of the business he or she wants to pursue for a career, consider circulating the intern throughout various departments to give him or her a broad experience. This can be valuable in any event, as he or she will need
to understand the full scope of the business when ultimately obtaining a full-time managerial position.

If you have a particular workforce need that you are trying to fill with the internship, be clear with your potential intern about what he or she will and will not be doing. Although there is a certain amount of administrative or laborer work that is acceptable in an internship, remember that your student is seeking to learn and gain substantive experience in the industry. The vast majority of the intern’s workload should be focused on gaining experience and insights into the industry and your company’s operations. If you will not be the intern’s direct supervisor, make sure that the supervisor is willing to mentor your intern and understands your and the intern’s expectations for what they will do and learn.

Consider scheduling a mid-term review for the internship to evaluate the student’s performance and provide a formal opportunity for the student to give feedback on his or her experiences up to that point. This may provide for a richer and more rewarding experience for both the employer and intern and allows a chance to correct any areas that may not be meeting expectations.

Don’t forget that when an internship is structured correctly and provides a satisfying experience for both employer and intern, it can be an excellent employee recruitment tool. Interns will be forming impressions about your company and the industry in general based upon their internship experience. Providing a fulfilling and valuable experience for your intern could lead to a qualified, knowledgeable full-time employee upon graduation.

After the Internship – After the internship, perform an exit interview with your intern to determine what he or she valued most and least in their internship with your company. Encourage him or her to give you honest feedback about how future internship opportunities could be improved. Ask your interns to share with you any reports or journals they prepare to chronicle their internship experience. Students receiving college credit for their internship will likely have some sort of document they will need to develop to relay their experiences and justify the credit. Also share your constructive feedback with the intern about areas in which he or she could improve or other items related to job performance.

Encourage your intern to stay in touch with you as he or she progresses through school. Offer to mentor him or her through the remainder of school and serve as a resource for industry information. If the intern did a good job, offer to provide letters of recommendation and job leads to him or her, whether or not you have the ability to hire him or her full time within your company. Establishing an avenue for continued dialogue and support will give you the edge in recruiting your intern as a future full-time employee. It also will instill loyalty and respect for your firm no matter what segment of the industry he or she ultimately chooses for a career. Remember, your intern could be a future employee, customer, supplier or competitor.
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Two primary problems plague the concrete floor construction and floor covering industries:

- Moisture problems that cause failures of floor coverings
- Floor flatness requirements for successful installation of floor coverings

The concrete slab moisture problem generally has revolved around the appropriate location of the vapor barrier/retarder in the slab construction detail. Due to concerns with random cracking, industry guidance in the past suggested that a sand cushion be placed over a vapor retarder to allow it to absorb water from the plastic concrete. This was later changed to indicate that the layer should be a granular crusher-run material that will not give way during construction. However, the problem of moisture related failures of floor coverings, possibly exacerbated by the change in formulation of
adhesives to comply with low volatile organic content (VOC) requirements, continued to grow. The ACI Committee for Concrete Floors, 302, revised its recommendations about two years ago. It now recommends in an addendum to ACI 302.1R-96 that if it is anticipated that a moisture sensitive floor covering will be placed on the slab, concrete should be placed directly on top of the vapor retarder. Closer joint spacing is recommended to minimize slab curling and cracking. The consensus here is that risk of random cracking and slab curling is more acceptable than failures of floor coverings where several million dollars have changed hands in concrete defect litigation.

Another issue related to this is how one determines when the concrete floor has achieved a low enough moisture condition to allow the installation of the floor covering. The more common method is the calcium chloride disc test (ASTM F 1869) that is used to measure the emission of moisture from the slab surface over a 72-hour test period. Most floor covering and adhesive manufacturers require a certain limiting value of moisture emissions, and possibly pH measurements, at the time of floor installation in order to maintain warranties on the product. In Europe, a method to measure the relative humidity in the near surface region of the concrete slab is preferred. This method is standardized as ASTM F 2170 but no clear criteria for floor installation are defined. Additionally, who does the testing and who is responsible for the decision to install the covering? The floor covering installers typically conduct these measurements but require the architect/engineer to take the responsibility for making the decision to install.

Several factors affect successful floor covering installation. A few are moisture sources at the site, location of the vapor retarder and related construction details, water content of the concrete, slab placement and drying under a roof and in controlled environment, and construction schedules allowing for sufficient time for drying. Several articles have been published in ACI’s Concrete International and Hanley-Wood’s Concrete Construction and Concrete Producer magazines that discuss the slab moisture problems and provide potential solutions.

Problems related to floor flatness requirements for installation of floor covering seems to be related to a disconnect between two portions of a construction specification – Division 3 for cast-in-place concrete and Division 9 for floor coverings. The problem relates to the fact that the concrete floor construction industry has evolved toward floor tolerance requirements defined by the F-number system determined in accordance with ASTM E 1155. The floor covering industry has retained the older system of floor flatness measured by a maximum deviation from a 10-foot straightedge. The different requirements do not jive. Further, for the concrete flooring contractor's specifica-
tion, the floor flatness is not measured across construction joints or within 2 feet of a column or other slab penetrations. The F-number measurements are conducted within 72 hours after finishing the floor. Floor flatness changes with time due to movement of the slab, curling, etc. The flooring installer sees a floor at a different flatness when he comes in to install the floor covering three to six months later. He needs to install the covering across joints and near columns. Further, carpet, vinyl, tile and other floor covering products have different floor flatness requirements. This presents a setup for all the finger pointing and assignment of responsibility. Suprenant discusses the “Concrete Floor Tolerance/Floor Covering Conundrum” in the July 2003 issue of ACI’s Concrete International. The American Society of Concrete Contractors (ASCC) have published a few position statements related to this matter that identify the floor contractor’s responsibilities while suggesting some solutions the architect/engineer need to consider in specifications that might add a marginal cost to the construction of the floor.

In April 2003, an Inter-Industry Working Group on Concrete Floor Issues was convened by the concrete industry groups that brought together the various affected parties from flooring contractors, flooring and adhesive manufacturers and installers. The meeting was intended to bring up the issues and concerns of each group. A final report on the meeting was recently published by the organizers, Construction Technology Laboratories, that discusses the various issues and identifies some potential strategies to follow in an attempt to fix some of these problems. The meeting of this diverse group was a good first step and there are plans for future meetings and to possibly include more specifiers and owners in the process.

Industry Honors Memory of Colleague

Virginia-based Newington Concrete and NewRock Materials honored the memory of its senior quality control representative Jeff Mosher by placing a portion of his cremated remains onto an Interstate highway bridge under construction in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

Mosher, who died in May from cancer, was directly involved with placing more than 35,000 cubic yards of concrete at the Springfield interchange project in Northern Virginia, which when finished will redirect drivers on Interstate 95 south of Washington. In July, some of his ashes were placed in a new concrete mixer and driven to a bridge deck pour on the interchange site. The load was placed through a concrete pump onto the deck of the tallest of the 50 bridges on the construction site.

Newington and NewRock officials thank the Virginia state DOT and the Shirley Contracting Company for their cooperation and join with the industry in mourning Mosher’s passing.
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FMI
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Please note: The column contained here should in no way be considered a substitute for competent legal counsel. It is only meant to be a guide to help employers know when it is necessary to consult an attorney on issues pertaining to labor-management relations and other workplace issues.

Question: How can I legally communicate with my employees about issues during a union organizing campaign? There are things I want to tell them before they vote whether to certify their union – but I don't want to be accused of interfering with the election.

Answer: First and foremost, you must keep in mind that actions taken by you are always open to interpretation, either by an employee or agents of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The Supreme Court has ruled that an employer's first amendment right to free speech as well as the Taft-Hartley Act allows him to comment and express his views on the election, unionism or a specific union. The employer may correct false statements made by the union and inform employees about the company's rights concerning labor negotiations. However, that right in no way allows him to threaten, coerce, force or make any promises of benefit with regard to the election at hand. One suggested rule to remember is that you may not “SPIT: Spy, Promise, Interrogate or Threaten” your employees at any time. However, employers may express any argument or opinion in any form, including verbal, written, printed, graphic and visual forms. There are, however, some very specific areas of comment that you should avoid. One of these areas concerns making predictions over the outcome unionization might have on your business. Such comments, particularly those that predict negative consequences such as throwing employees out of work or the possible closure or relocation of the plant, could be construed as threats of retaliation, whether or not you mean them to be. While your intention may be to educate your employees about certain issues, the NLRB has concluded that any statements made by you or your managers that could be reasonably interpreted by your employees as a threat could be considered as election interference. Your best course of action would be to prepare literature and/or public statements and have them reviewed by a labor attorney before issuing them to your employees.
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   **Concrete Plant Operator’s Manual.**
   Jointly prepared by the Concrete Plant Manufacturers Bureau and NRMCA, this manual is a comprehensive guide for the batch plant operator. It includes valuable information on materials, batch tolerance and aggregate moisture, calculations, plant maintenance, safety and more. ($20 members; $30 non-members)

5. **2PTRI –**
   **Toxics Release Inventory Guidance for the Ready Mixed Concrete Industry.**
   Do you know your company’s responsibilities for reporting under Toxics Release Inventory guidelines? NRMCA has published a TRI document specifically for the ready mixed concrete industry. The document includes a flow chart you may follow to determine your reporting status, as well as specific thresholds that trigger reporting of chemical compounds likely to be used in your ready mixed operation. ($50 members, $350 non-members)

6. **2P160 – Maintenance Manual.**
   An organized maintenance program is the cornerstone of an efficient and economical ready mixed concrete operation. This manual will help you establish a maintenance program for your company. ($10 member, $13 non-member)

7. **2PSV4 - Safe Drum Cleaning (Video).**
   This 12-minute video is a comprehensive video on what to do and what not to do when chipping concrete in a truck mixer drum, with an emphasis on proper personal protective equipment. ($75 member, $97.50 non-member)

8. **2P188 - Truck Mixer Driver’s Manual.**
   This manual is intended to educate truck mixer drivers about concrete and customer relations. It also highlights driver duties, safety precautions, equipment inspection and maintenance procedures, and what the driver should do in the event of an accident. This 64-page manual is easy to understand and includes commonsense information every driver should know. ($8 member, $11 non-member, bulk order discounts available)

9. **2PENVCK- Concrete Plant Environmental Audit Checklist.**
   This checklist provides a convenient tool to help ready mixed concrete producers evaluate their facilities to determine the extent to which they are operating in an environmentally sound manner and complying with potentially applicable environmental regulations and statutes. ($15 member, $75 non-member)

10. **2PCTB –**
    **NRMCA Concrete Toolbox.**
    A software tool for the ready mixed industry covering basic calculations involved in concrete production, testing and construction. Includes aggregate testing, basic mixture proportioning procedure and ACI 318 strength data for submittals and acceptance on the job. A valuable education tool for quality control personnel. ($195 members; $250 non-members)

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