

WHITE PAPER

# Partners in Safety

## Best Practices for Contracted Partner Alignment and Safety Enablement





Organizations continue to advance their safety performance through innovations spanning safety leadership excellence, system enhancements (such as serious incident and catastrophic event prevention ), technology integration, human organizational performance, and risk-based decision-making. For these advancements to take hold and thrive, aligning with contracted partners is necessary to sustain safety and wellness results.

### The Contractor Conundrum

The use of contractors (including subcontractors, vendors, and other contingent workers) has been steadily increasing as a vital supplement to organizations' talent strategy and capital excellence demands. Companies are using contracted talent as a just-in-time supplement to their workforce or to tap into specialty skills, but it isn't without risk. Sometimes contractors become a nested part of the workforce and it can be difficult to identify a contractor from anyone else. Other times, contractors are short-term or transient, making it more difficult to integrate them into the organizational culture and safety practices. This, of course, adds risk and threatens productivity, on-time performance, and brand reputations. of both partner organizations

Companies increasingly rely on contractors to handle demanding production schedules, efficiency goals, and competitive market pressures. Despite facing global political and economic challenges, prioritizing workplace safety as a core organizational principle has become critically

important worldwide. Today, many organizations integrate their business partners into safety performance tracking and include them in public sustainability reports and other external communications.

Contractor strengths are generally applied to support a larger operational goal, whether for day-to-day production or special circumstances such as outages and capital improvements. The choreographed execution of both routine intertwined activities and complex projects sometimes allows for critical error conditions to emerge. These often go unnoticed due to normalization of deviation. Further, relationships between and among contractor partners and organizational employees influence team communication and interpersonal dynamics for better or worse.

### Aligning on Safety

DEKRA, as the world's largest safety company (50,000 employees strong) supports organizations to both proactively establish sustainable team-based safety practices and responsively course correct if problems emerge. Using science-backed, data driven solutions, we focus on building resilience and vigilance in equal measure. The goal is to foster true partnership between organization and contractor employees by bringing them together in a shared commitment to safety This does not happen homogenously without both strategic and tactical application at a unified level.

## Safety in the Spotlight

Recent statistics highlight that a worker in the United States died every 99 minutes from a work-related injury—5,283 in total.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 11% (568) of these team members were specialty trade contractors, such as carpenters, construction laborers, electricians, plumbers, pipefitters, steamfitters, and first-line supervisors of such workers.<sup>1</sup> Nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses accounted for more than 450 times the fatality rate, with 2,568,000 incidents..

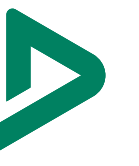
The use of contract labor has been steadily rising. In the manufacturing sector's core occupations, contract labor rose 45% in 10 years, increasing from 6.9 percent of the workforce in 2000 to 10 percent in 2019. <sup>1</sup>

If roughly 1 in 10 workers is a contractor, a significant part of your workforce must be fully up to speed on your safety programs and practices and enabled to ensure safety for all.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release, December 19, 2024. [Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by industry sectors and selected events or exposures\(1\), 2023 - 2023 A01 Results](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Industries at a Glance: Specialty Trade Contractors: NAICS 238 : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Day and Susan Housman, The Rise of the Contract Workforce in U.S. Manufacturing and Its Implications for Worker Skill Measures, DRAFT, December 2022. [HousemanRiseOfContractWorkforceDraft.pdf](#)



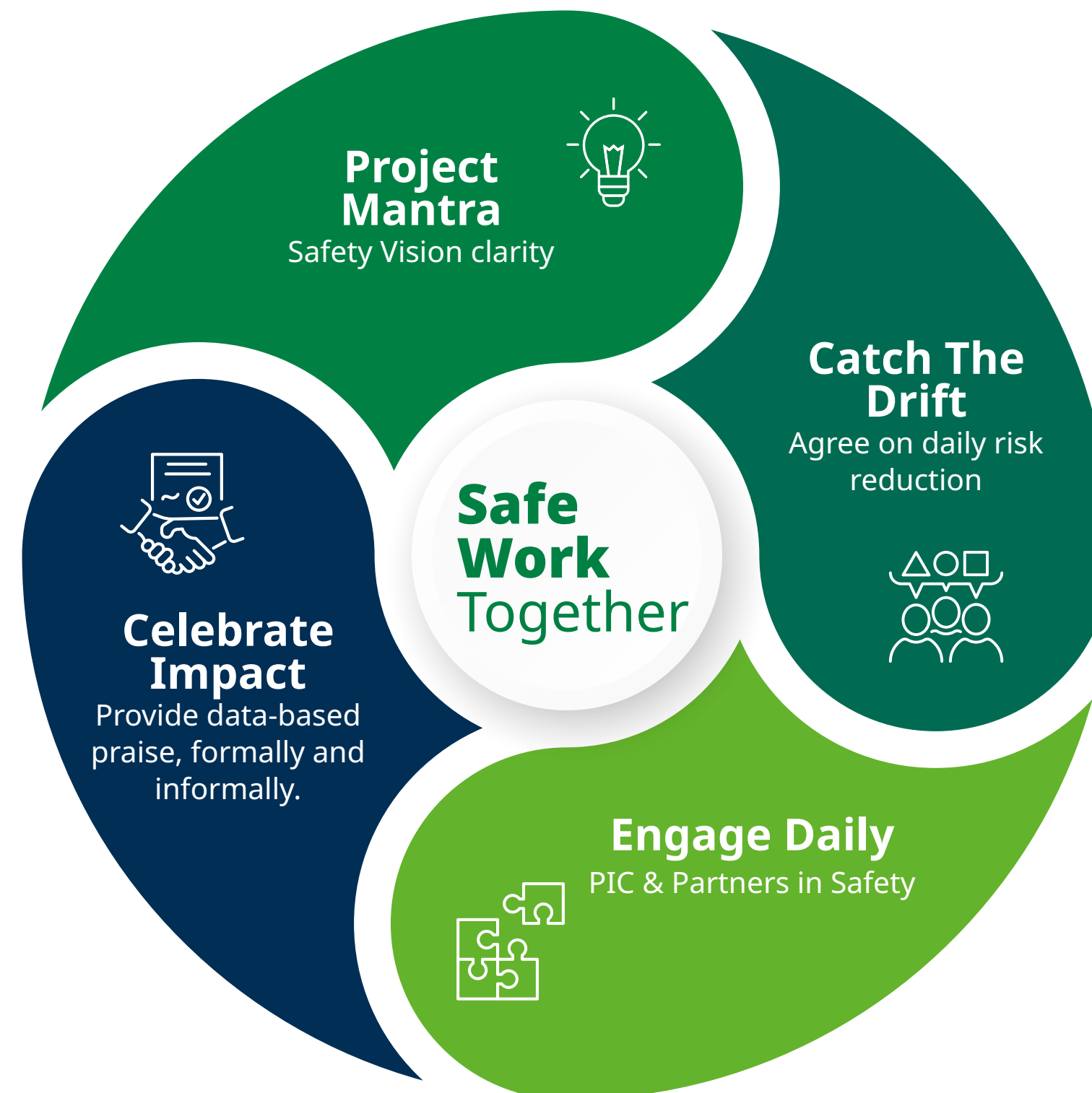
*Partners in Safety* is DEKRA's approach to aligning on safety that goes beyond contractor vetting and drives multi-organization success. While safe-on-paper vetting is important, past performance does not guarantee future results, and lagging indicator focused vetting may not reveal hidden issues that could impact health and safety. We pioneered our contracted partnership approach in the oil and gas industry where carefully curated alignment on and operational controls is an essential component of safety excellence. Helping our clients advance in maturity from safety as a priority to world class safety has involved a focus on a wider team culture, inclusive of contracted partners. World class excellence creates contracted partnerships without "us and them" undertones.

## The Partners in Safety Approach: Connect & Catch Drift Together

### 1. Connect with a Project Mantra

Odds are, a simple saying or mnemonic from childhood or a marketing slogan has stuck with you. Maybe it's "i before e except after c" or "righty-tighty, lefty-loosey." It is helpful or memorable and something about it just resonates.

In Partners in Safety, we use project mantras to help people connect with their work and the organization's point of view. Long spiels about "safety first" are a turnoff for most everyone, but a short impactful message/mantra that succinctly defines what a project or work group is all about or how safety is valued and executed makes all the



difference in setting up social norms and required ways of working together.

One example: "If it's not safe, we simply don't do it." This message, stated by the CEO of one of our client organizations, resonated across the entire company after being shared impactfully a number of times. It has become part of the cultural lexicon and carries weight among leaders and teams as a guiding principle where no rule or procedure exists for every situation. Another example:

"Welcome to our site. We take safety seriously, so you will get asked to demonstrate how you do too."

A uniting mantra seems simple, but the neuroscience that underpins its power is real. Through the repetition of affirming statements, the brain can form new neural pathways, which create physical connections to these repeated thoughts.<sup>1</sup> Think about the last time you worked to form or break a habit—it's likely one of the key aspects of the neuroscience of the subconscious mind that played a role. If you don't already have an effective mantra, it's easy to work with your Partners in Safety to wordsmith one. The more heart the better!

**"A uniting mantra seems simple, but the neuroscience that underpins its power is real."**

### 2. Catch the Drift

Catching drift away from safe work is critically important as a team, not just as an individual contributor. How partners in safety together manage risk requires alignment on what is actually risky. It's common for companies to have differing levels of risk acceptance and differences in how each group tolerates drift from safety best practices. Some have low tolerance and pause work to regroup, and some continue with the thought that "we have to get this done no matter what," rather than raising a flag to the wider group. It is also common for groups or





individuals to have diminished psychological safety around drawing risk to light.

Is a good partner in safety one who keeps their head down and executes to schedule without raising concerns? Definitely not! Engaged partners in safety share openly about their limitations, present issues, and incites a safe and productive outcome. Participating openly in risk assessment processes with authenticity and rigor is the best way to catch the drift and prevent operational upsets, injuries, and brand-damaging major events. Creating a speak up culture benefits partnership innovation, process optimization, and engagement as well as risk mitigation.

### 3. **Continue to Engage Daily**

What we do as part of our day-to-day says a lot about who we are and what we value individually and collectively. In DEKRA's assessment work, we often notice that people quite naturally speak about valuing safety, and sometimes this matches their actions. But other times, some aspects are espoused rather than lived. When leaders spend time engaging in planning meetings and observing work they are able to note what's working and what's not. Creating conversational micro-alignment moments throughout the day to pull partners in safety together on controlling exposure is a hallmark of effective work teams, lucrative projects, and truly safe worksites.

Too often disagreement and misalignment about risk goes unsaid or is not given meaningful consideration. A kickoff meeting sets expectations and aligns on objectives,

**“Creating conversational micro-alignment moments throughout the day to pull partners in safety together on controlling exposure is a hallmark of effective work teams, lucrative projects, and truly safe worksites.”**

an effective execution planning meeting sets the tone of the partnership. The latter tamps down risk with everyone focused and with chronic unease in place daily. This practice has to be cultivated, as human nature is for teams to go quiet and skip to production goals too quickly. Exposure and risk are not adequately addressed in performative planning meetings.

### 4. **Celebrate Impact**

The word “celebrate” evokes images of birthdays and anniversaries. At work it sparks thoughts of milestone achievements: service awards, performance merit, or time without incidents. Celebration has the most impact when experienced in alignment with an immediate behavior, with appreciation and value shown for real-time impact on safe work or a related positive cultural contribution.

Celebration events are good for culture and people love them. Daily, outcomes-aligned praise for specific micro-wins in safety moves the needle on engagement. Such praise demonstrates the organizational value for safety as paramount to all other celebrations, brands individuals and teams as contributors to company success, reinforces

future behavior, and influences others to do the same. Planned appreciation goes a long way by conveying the message “I see you and thank you for making us safer.” Partners on site may benefit from observing your celebrations, but the real impact comes when they are included.

Often times, contracted partnerships are measured based on time to deliver or using efficiency-based scorecarding. In the spirit of celebration, rewards-based contracts with joint Service Level Agreements and mutually beneficial scorecards are becoming more prevalent. Partnership in safety includes recognizing and rewarding contribution to learning teams, equipping workers for safer decision making, aligning to the systems we have in place that drive a culture indicative of world class safety. Celebrate the impact made on your business by your partners in safety!

## **DEKRA is YOUR trusted Partner in Safety**

DEKRA experts provide customized guidance and support at every stage of your journey to engage your entire team, employees and contractors alike, in the pursuit of world-class safety.

Please connect with us for more information about how DEKRA can support you to drive safe outcomes across your team of Partners in Safety.



## ▶ References

1. [www.brainfutures.org/neuroplasticity-101](http://www.brainfutures.org/neuroplasticity-101)

## Connect with Us

Connect with us to see how we can help you seamlessly integrate your partners in safety into your organization.

Email us: [osr.info.us@dekra.com](mailto:osr.info.us@dekra.com)

Website: [dekra.us/partnersinsafety](http://dekra.us/partnersinsafety)

LEARN MORE