

Self-Reflection

Lam Man Sum 3035185495

The experience in this trip to Vietnam is definitely a memorable and life changing one.

I remembered the first time I stepped into the construction site, I was nervous because the site was so unsafe in the first sight. Through the broken stairs I entered the site area. Overhead wires hanging from places to places, projecting nails from the wood, the uneven ground I stepped on was not concrete, but clay, sand, wood pieces and bricks. Things should not have appeared in a safe construction site appeared here. I wear hats instead of helmets, and sneakers instead of safety shoes, with a pair of gloves, I feel like I am not protected from the danger. But looking at the workers without gloves, seeing some of them even wearing sandals, the thought in my mind told myself not to complain too much and just pay extra attention to the safety issues that would affect my safety.

Days passed by and we got more familiar with the site condition. We followed the way that the local workers did their work. We knew that there was a “pond” behind the library building, which will be filled with soil and sand after completion. The “pond” was a perfect breeding place for mosquito, we do not stay there to prevent mosquito bites; We do not step into any puddles or wet soil nearby because the soil maybe very soft and one may trap his leg inside, we were aware of that because one of the engineering students once stepped into a puddle; We noticed the safest route on site, where there were the least amount of blockage and potential falling objects. These were the findings and what we have learnt in only one-weeks’ time. Comparing to the first day I entered the construction site, I am very much confident to walk into the construction site, with the same equipment: a hat, a pair of sneakers, and a pair of gloves.

Getting familiar with the site condition may help to avoid dangerous places, but the inconvenient truth is, it lowered the awareness of the workers to the surrounding environment. Getting familiar to one place does not require a long period of time. I was less alert to the site safety after spending a few hours in the site. The situation aggravated when there were a lot of work to do, especially when you were exhausted under the sun.

Once we helped in fixing the falsework for the casting of RC slab on the roof. Workers were standing on a simple bamboo frame fixed by rusted nails. I stood on the ground level, looking at the workers working in height. They showed no fear. It was the experience and the skills they had made them climbing confidently across bamboo rods. Workers were sun-tanned due to the typical weather in Vietnam. It is hard to work in this harsh and intense working environment: with an average of 35°C, humid and very shiny in day time.

As an engineering student, I noticed that there were a lot of safety issues on site. But the saddest thing is that there are so little things we, as an engineering student, can do for the workers. Safety issues were recorded in every site diary, yet, no change could be made to secure a safe working environment for the workers. Helmets, safety shoes, gloves or safety harnesses etc. requires money to purchase; Extra and better quality falsework requires more resources to make; Better organization of the workplace takes a lot of time and may delay the whole project. In the weekly short meeting with the consultants and contractors, they often mentioned that there were difficulties in complying their work to the standards in Hong Kong, making me hard to mention a single word about site safety to them.

Luckily, till the end of the construction, no serious injury had happened. I always thought, if I were given a second chance, I would mention about site safety to the local workers, even it would not help to alleviate the problem immediately. Nonetheless, big goals start from little changes. It is so ironic that the workers themselves put their work in a higher priority than their own safety. What's more is that site safety is often linked with a decrease in work efficiency. While considering the management of a construction project, cost usually comes first. Sadly, the safety of the workers was put into the least consideration. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure a safe working place for the workers. Nevertheless, I look forward to alternatives and cheaper methods can be done to improve worker's safety in the future.