



Commitment to Safety Saves Life at Trussway Plant

by Libby Maurer

Imagine this. A veteran worker collapses while working on the floor truss line in the middle of his shift. A supervisor determines he does not have a pulse and isn't breathing. Within seconds, the worker stops breathing and has no pulse. Would you and your staff know what to do?

Knowing what to do in an emergency kept their coworker alive...

Trussway's assistant production manager Francisco "Paco" Delgado and every person on his shift that day in January knew exactly what to do when 57-year-old Tony Rodriguez collapsed. Thanks to the company's firmly embedded safety program.

Earlier that morning at the Houston truss plant, Tony told a coworker he was having some pain in his chest. The coworker mentioned it to floor truss department supervisor Luis Aceves, who asked Tony if wanted to have it checked out. Tony said no, but requested light work for the day. Shortly after his lunch break, Tony fell to the ground. Supervisor Luis called for Paco on his radio and also called for foreman José to assist. Paco immediately recognized the severity of the incident (remembering Tony's chest pain) and called 911 on his way to reach Tony.

Recalling his many years of CPR training, Paco confirmed that Tony was not breathing and did not have a pulse. Luis ran to get a protective airway mask (PAM) while José started chest compressions. Paco administered CPR once the PAM arrived. During this time, Tony regained and then lost his pulse and breaths several times, but remained unconscious. "He was gasping for air at one time, which we knew was a good thing," Paco said.

While Paco and José continued administering CPR, Brady Bates (operations manager) and Frank Madden (production manager) arrived on scene to coordinate the next steps. Frank conducted a secondary survey of the site. "I felt his legs to see if he had broken any bones and looked around to see if anything else wrong," he said. Frank confirmed that Luis was in charge of directing the ambulance from the facility's front gate to the shop. Luis went to gather basic information about Tony from his personnel file to give to the EMTs, like his full name, age, social security number, phone number and address. Luis also placed a call to Tony's emergency

Above: (left to right) Paco, Luis and Jose were instrumental in saving their coworker's life because they knew what to do. Trussway's commitment to safety insured that a plan was in place to handle this type of emergency situation.

contact. All the while, Paco and José continued CPR on the ground.

When the ambulance arrived, Luis directed it to the shop. Once they reached Tony, they took over for Paco and José, immediately cutting his shirts off. The EMTs used a defibrillator to "shock" his heart into a normal rhythm twice before they lifted him onto a gurney, and a third time in the ambulance. A Trussway employee was assigned to follow the ambulance to the hospital.

Brady immediately made the decision to stop production and sent the crew to the lunch room. "There was too much noise, and we didn't want anyone to get into an accident being distracted from what had happened to Tony," Paco said. He debriefed the crew the next day, giving them the opportunity to ask questions and talk about the incident. "Just so there was no speculation about what had taken place," said Frank.

"I don't think words can express seeing a group of people come together to save an individual's life," Brady said. Paco credits a true team effort with keeping Tony alive. "Many people had something to do with [the effort]. Everyone had a role."

Rule #1: Safety First!

Frank explained that the company's dedication to putting safety first started long ago. "There was a time when Trussway was fragmented into several companies, and then [our locations] came together under one umbrella in the early '90s to what is now Trussway," he said. Madden remembered that along with this change came a push to standardize a comprehensive company-wide safety program. "The idea was for each truss plant to have the same procedures, same meetings, same bonuses," Frank said. At the time, he was in charge of administering the safety program which was managed and written by Rip Rogers.

The result was a long-standing program with a clear message: "Rule #1 is safety is #1," Brady said.

To that end, the company implemented safety meetings at every level of leadership. "We have a pre-shift safety meeting every Monday where we go over a topic, accidents that happened in the shop, and review safety information about the equipment...whether you operate it or

Every Minute Counts

When treating a victim of sudden cardiac arrest (SCA), every minute that passes could mean the difference between life and death. Literally. According to the American Heart Association, a victim's chances of survival are reduced by 7 to 10 percent with every minute that passes without CPR and defibrillation. Few attempts at resuscitation succeed after 10 minutes. "The doctors said had it not been for the CPR, Tony wouldn't be alive today," said Brady Bates.

[Source: American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4481]

not." Brady said. A Safety Committee at each plant was formed, with Frank scheduling a monthly meeting on the same day. "I published a calendar so everyone would have their meeting on the same day." In the event of an accident at one of the plants, the other Trussway plants are notified. "The Safety Committee discusses it so the same mistake wouldn't happen at another plant," he said. On a quarterly basis, they've implemented "self plant inspections," where teams of two or so workers walk through each department and inspect it for hazards.

Incentives Pay

Incentives are a mainstay of Trussway's safety program. If the plant goes two months without an accident, the entire crew is treated to free lunch. In addition, workers with no report

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Thanks to well-trained co-workers and early CPR, Tony Rodriguez survived his ordeal. During a two-week stay in the hospital, doctors discovered he had three blocked arteries. He will have surgery as soon as he regains his strength.

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able accidents compete in a weekly game of Safety Poker. (Production supervisors and managers are excluded; a separate safety bonus program exists for them.) The goal is for each member of the 8- to 10-person team to avoid an accident that requires professional medical care. (Minor injuries that can be treated in-house do not count.)

Individual awards also exist: Any worker who avoids a trip to the clinic for treating an injury incurred on the job in a calendar year receives a cash bonus based on tenure. "We think the incentives are worth it," said Frank. "The way we look at it, we'd rather reward our employees than pay doctors or lawyers [in the event of an accident]."

Finally...first aid and CPR training. Brady said all supervisors, foremen and a few additional shop workers attend first aid

and CPR trainings that alternate every six months. Trussway employs retired Houston firefighter Art Abert to conduct the training. "He makes it really fun for the guys," said Frank.

Paco and José said administering CPR was automatic—possibly because they've attended numerous training sessions throughout their Trussway employment. "Something just kicked in. It was unexplainable," Paco said. Brady applauded the team for staying calm, another benefit of bi-annual CPR training. "There was no hesitation in anything they did."

The company says the benefit of integrating a safety program into daily truss plant life is measurable. "When you have fewer accidents your modifier goes down...and [workers' compensation] insurance premiums are based on modifiers," said Frank. "So fewer accidents really does equal lower premiums."

But there is no experience modifier on a human life. In this emergency, being properly trained in a safety program meant everyone stayed calm and performed seamlessly until medical professionals arrived. It probably saved Tony Rodriguez's life. After getting a positive report about Tony's recovery, President and COO Jim Thomas applauded the Houston team. "No words can express how proud this company is of the employees who responded and made a difference between life and death." **SBC**

Special thanks to Rip Rogers for helping with this story.



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Here are several critical procedures that Trussway followed. Consider reviewing them at your next safety meeting.

- 1. Recognize an emergency.** One of the keys to survival is recognizing the warning signs of a heart attack, cardiac arrest, stroke or choking.
- 2. Call 9-1-1.** It's critical to call 9-1-1 immediately. If you're by yourself, call 9-1-1 first, if there are other people available, have someone who has information about the emergency call while you begin CPR. The 9-1-1 dispatcher will ask question; keep your answers short and specific. Stay on the phone with the 9-1-1 dispatcher until THEY hang up.
- 3. Get trained in CPR to help prolong a life until the paramedics arrive.** Begin CPR as soon as possible. According to the American Heart Association, CPR is absolutely critical for buying time because it keeps oxygenated blood flowing to the brain and heart. The earlier you administer CPR to a person in cardiac or respiratory arrest, the greater their chances of survival. If you have an Automated External Defibrillator (AED), use it. Remember, an AED will NOT deliver a shock to a person that cannot be helped with a shock. They are very safe and user-friendly.

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Important Emergency Procedures

By Molly E. Butz

- 4. Have the protective airway mask (PAM) on hand.** Always ensure rescuer safety. Keeping the other people on the scene safe with personal protective equipment and smart decisions should be a priority.
- 5. Position someone outside the property to guide help directly to the affected individual.** This ensures a direct path to the victim and minimizes any confusion.
- 6. Call an immediate relative.** Make sure all employees have current information on file on the premises.
- 7. Give the employee's information to the paramedics.** Include full name, address and social security number.
- 8. Send a representative to the hospital with employee information.** This person can relay important information about the incident to medical staff that the family members may not have.

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