

Reaching Another Gear on Safety, and on the Motocross Track

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Safety is our job #1, and helping keep it that way is Dave Stanton, our construction safety administrator. Learn how Dave, who never outgrew playing in the mud, feels about one of our fun and important jobs.

How would you describe your job to a first grader?

My job involves playing in the mud alongside really big toys.

What's the coolest part of your job?

I get to be part of construction projects throughout the entire life cycle that will lead to improvements at Portland International Airport. This involves working with the design team to ensure prevention thru design, with particular emphasis on ensuring the new facility being constructed is safe for our maintenance personnel to maintain. I also help ensure the construction activities pose no risk to members of the public, airport personnel or our infrastructure. I get to participate in contractor selection, which includes identifying contractors that have outstanding safety programs and culture. I also work side-by-side with Port and contractor personnel to ensure the work proceeds in a safe manner.

What's the one thing about you that would surprise people?

I race motocross. Not really something a safety pro should do in their off-time. I attended a motocross race three years ago and thought to myself that I could do as well as some of the novice riders on the track. I found a used race bike and entered a race, where I crashed hard and injured my back. It caused me to wonder what I had gotten myself into. I entered another race a couple weeks later and only had minor crashes and thought that maybe this stuff could be fun. Little by little I got better and the past two years I entered over 20 races and won the season championship last year. I have moved up to a tougher class this year and my goal is to finish in the top five in 3-5 years.

What aspect of your job keeps you up at night?

Some of our construction involves high risk activities. Our contractors work to reduce the risk, but you can't always engineer out all the hazards. These things don't always stay behind at work when I go home and they often stay in the forefront of my thoughts at night.

What's the best safety tip that most people don't consider?

If it looks unsafe, it probably is unsafe. Don't assume that the worker is working in the safest manner. If you see something that looks unsafe, don't be shy about asking the person if their activity is safe. That may cause them to rethink what they are doing and hopefully work safer. This applies both to a job site and at home.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

I thought about being an astronaut or astronomer, and even a professional trumpet player. But then my grandmother took me to Bonneville Dam when I was a tyke in the 1960s. I was enamored with the dam and all of the stuff going on and wondered how someone got to work there. I asked my grandmother who ran the dam and she told me, "The Army Corps of Engineers, Son." Who knew that in 2007, I would be working for the Corps of Engineers and working at Bonneville Dam as part of my job. Working for the Corps provided me with incredible construction safety experience. The Corps has construction projects all across the globe and the experience I gained as a safety professional working in multiple countries and across the nation was invaluable. No matter what the location or type of project, construction poses similar hazards and reducing or eliminating those hazards has the reward of knowing someone goes home that night with no injuries.