



## Moving Construction Safety Research to Practice

### From Summer Internship to Impactful Industry Collaboration: A Case Study on Moving Safety Research to Practice

Zhenyu Zhang. CPWR Small Study, October 2024.

#### Overview

Research over the past 15 years has examined the barriers to greater use of research-based safe work practices and equipment in construction. Not only does the industry often lack awareness of these solutions, but studies have found that the solutions may not reflect industry priorities or fully incorporate workers' and contractors' knowledge. Partnerships across a diverse network—including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, industry representatives, and university and/or government researchers—have been instrumental to advancing safety research to construction practice. This study explores a four-and-a-half-year research-to-practice (r2p) partnership between university researchers and a roofing contractor in the Pacific Northwest, focusing on ergonomic injury prevention and safety culture at the contractor. The contractor has 150 field staff and 30 office personnel. A notable aspect of this partnership is that the lead investigator transitioned from a student internship to an embedded "researcher-in-residence." Research methods included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 25 stakeholders, from frontline employees to executives.

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#### Read the report:

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#### Key Findings

- This case study demonstrates the value researchers can add to their industry partners through r2p collaborations. The contractor valued the researchers' roles in providing outside perspectives and research expertise and serving as catalysts for internal change.
- To begin an r2p partnership that benefits both the contractor and the researchers, it is essential to alleviate the contractor's concerns about potential risks from the collaboration. Demonstrating competence and maintaining effective communication will solidify researchers' credibility and foster optimism about the partnership's mutual benefits.
- During an r2p initiative, reliability and credibility are prerequisites for researchers to integrate seamlessly into the contractor team and align staff with a common purpose of translating research to enhance worker safety. Trust, although time-consuming to build, can quickly erode without proper maintenance.
- Developing trust and reciprocity in collaborations must be ongoing. Researchers can start by engaging in small-scale collaborations to solve problems identified by industry partners. As the readiness of the contractor and research team to collaborate improves, these r2p collaborations can expand into larger projects.
- The study's research collaboration was enabled by r2p-focused external funding, which supports researchers in building partnerships with contractors. This funding is scarce yet essential and should be advocated for broader adoption to encourage more r2p initiatives.



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