

## Safety the Perfect Rx for this Hospital Project

General contractor Rudolph and Sletten's latest project, which has been certified in Cal/OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program for Construction, combines complexity, patient safety considerations, and the typical hazards of multi-story construction.



*The Lusardi Tower at Scripps Memorial Hospital in Encinitas is in phase two of a nine-phase project*

The company's secret weapon is its safety culture, which emphasizes mentoring and engaging trade partners. Not only has R&S achieved another in a sizable list of projects in VPP, but six of seven of its subcontractors at Lusardi Tower at Scripps Memorial Hospital in Encinitas have qualified for the Golden Gate Recognition Program for employers who demonstrate an effective Injury and Illness Prevention Program.

"Eighty-five percent of our work is subcontracted and 95% of the labor on a project is our trade partners," says company president and CEO Jon Foad. "We can't do it alone. What we can do is bring the philosophies of safety to the jobs."

### Operational Considerations

The Lusardi Tower project, now in its second phase, is a three-story, 224,000-square-foot facility that, when completed, will add 64 private inpatient rooms, multiple operating rooms, and the Lusardi Pulmonary Institute, notes Paul Leppke, Rudolph and Sletten's regional safety manager in San Diego. "This expansion will increase the hospital's total bed count to 230," he says. "The project is being built in about nine different phases."

Construction phase two aims to ensure new service facilities and operations are complete before demolishing existing facilities. That's just part of the "operational considerations" that come with the Scripps project. "It's crucial that we keep hospital operations going 100% of the time," Leppke says. We cannot disturb the hospital." Also crucial is maintaining critical utilities, including electrical, water, heating, ventilation, and cooling.

"We have vibration and noise control, and careful planning from the team here to reduce construction impact on sensitive areas like operating and patient rooms," he says. The site requires "clear signage marking critical areas for worker navigation and safety, and knowing what's on the other side of the walls of the hospital. Isolation of construction zones to prevent interference with medical functions. We want to minimize disruption to the hospital through strategic planning and teamwork."

From the start of the project, R&S employed a sticker sign-off system for all utilities during the demolition of the old hospital. "Each trade contractor would need to verify what utility could be safely demoed and what utilities would need to stay," Leppke tells *Cal-OSHA Reporter*.



*CEO Jon Foad: "We can't do it alone."*

### Patient Well-being

Tim Jacoby, corporate vice president for statewide facilities operations for Scripps, which has five hospitals and some 30 clinics in San Diego County, emphasizes the patient aspect. "It is absolutely incumbent upon us to make sure that we aid in their healing instead of hurting them. And construction activity has the capacity to injure patients, not directly by something falling or something like that." The threat is from nosocomial infections – those suffered in medical facilities.

Such infections are "killers in hospitals," Jacoby says, especially for patients with compromised immune systems. Dirt or dust can make its way into a ventilation system and cause either direct or secondary infections.

On the Scripps project, he notes, "We don't have any of that. This is not our biggest project by any means, but it is by far the most complex, with all the staging, with all the phases. We are literally right next to the patient care units, and you guys are doing a fabulous job," Jacoby told the assembled employees and company/subcontractor officials for the recent VPP-C ceremony. He singled out Rudolph and Sletten senior project executive Darren Phelan for his and the construction team's "incredible" attitude and responsiveness to Scripps.

The GC submitted Advanced Notice of Disturbance information to Scripps and Infection Risk Control Assessments (IRCAs) "to maintain patient health and safety," Leppke explains. IRCAs identify potential sources of infection with appropriate control measures. "The process involves evaluating the risks

associated with various construction activities, such as dust generation airflow and the potential for pathogens to spread.” Mitigation includes barriers, proper ventilation, and employee training.

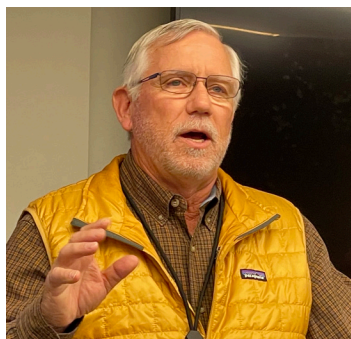


**Regional Safety Manager Paul Leppke:** “We cannot disturb the hospital.”

As the project progresses, safety goals for the workforce are also being met. Leppke notes that so far, more than 330,000 hours have been worked on this project covering about 700 days, and there have been zero “doctor cases” and no lost-time incidents. At its peak, the project had about 250 construction workers on site.

“The biggest risk for the project’s workers was struck-by,” Leppke notes. “The worksite is very tight and congested.” The team used strategic planning, work plans, and pre-task plans to show where material could be offloaded and placed. An enclosed ramp to the basement was used to deliver material, and dedicated trash chutes, laydown yards, and access and egress pathways “have helped workers stay safe from any struck-by scenarios.”

### Attention to Detail



**Scripps’ Tim Jacoby:** Project is “the most complex.”

Jacoby emphasizes the complexity of hospital projects. “I’m a former Navy’ nuke,’ and probably the two hardest things to do is either build or refuel a nuclear reactor, or build a hospital,” he explains. “They’re both really hard and require a tremendous amount of attention to detail.”

“There are systems everywhere,” he tells *Cal-OSHA* Reporter. “If you look above the drop ceiling and then look at the actual ceiling on some of the floors, there is no spare room. The coordination for everything above that ceiling has got to be exact. It’s merciless, there is no room for error. It has to be exactly per plan, while the drawings aren’t always perfect. You’ve got to have that constant feedback between the contractor and the design team to make sure that if you can’t build it to plan it gets changed and reapproved, so that it’s safe and good to go.”

R&S’s Phelan credits the company’s and its people’s commitment to safety for their continued safety achievement. The safety commitment is “not because you’re checking a box or because it’s a policy. It’s the people that are actually making a difference. It’s no coincidence that we’re almost at 700 days with no lost-time injuries.



**Employees and officials at the Lusardi Tower project display the VPP-C flag.**

That’s a testament to everything” that the employees are doing out in the field.

### ‘Raising Everybody’s Boat’

Foad notes that Rudolph and Sletten has mentored almost 50 subcontractors into the Golden Gate program over the years. “A lot of our mission is to bring the culture of safety.” He credits Senior Safety Manager Bryan Fink “for carrying that torch for the 13 years that it’s taken us to get to this point.” In addition to the Scripps project, the GC has a veterans facility enrolled in VPP-C ([click here](#) for our coverage) and is starting certification work on a large hospital campus in San Jose.



**The VPP flag and Rudolph and Sletten banner are on display for the public.**



Contractors may have three VPP-C projects enrolled in the program at any time. “We are also talking to [Cal/OSHA] about getting our yard to be a VPP SHARP” site. SHARP stands for the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program for fixed and mobile sites. It can be a stepping stone toward VPP certification.



**Senior Safety Director Bryan Fink:** “Safety can’t be a priority. Safety is a culture.”

Foad notes that so far, the company has mentored 69 trade partners, 49 of whom have received Golden Gate recognition. “Very few times do we have a duplicate,” he remarks. Once you get to Golden Gate, we hope that has brought that [safety] culture to your company. We always try to get new trade partners in.” In turn, R&S hopes those companies—and employees—spread safety consciousness throughout the industry.

The CEO relates an anecdote from several years ago that illustrates how a safety culture can spread. “We did a job at Washington Hospital [in Fremont] and I got a random text from a painter” on the project. He told Foad, “When I first got out there, your safety policies drove me nuts. I hated going to work, because safety, that’s all you guys talked about. But when I went to my next job, I was scared to death every day because the contractor didn’t believe in safety. They couldn’t spell safety, I realized what a benefit and blessing it was for me to be able to work on your job.”

Foad adds, “Part of this VPP [effort] is raising everybody’s boat.”



**Rudolph and Sletten’s Scripps safety team:** Carlos Moreno, senior superintendent, Kyle Frye, superintendent and Ramon Moreno, senior jobsite safety coordinator.

The company president adds that “a safe job is a productive job most of the time. With safety comes cleanliness. The cleaner the job, the safer the job.” Reducing injuries and illnesses enhances product quality and work productivity and lowers workers’ compensation costs, Foad says. “It all makes financial sense.”

Carl Paganelli, Cal/OSHA deputy chief of consultation, process safety management, and engineering services lauded the company for its commitment. “You could have the best set of binders and checklist in the world, but all the paperwork means nothing. It has to be something you practice every day. That’s



**R&S’s latest safety Challenge Coin.**

an incredible commitment to safety.”

He observes that there are currently thousands of construction projects in California, including hundreds of large projects like the Scripps Hospital. “But there are only 14 VPP-C projects in California right now. It’s a testament to your commitment, hard work, and dedication.”

To reinforce the safety message, the company presents “Challenge Coins” to on-site workers who are observed doing something right. Fink sums up the philosophy: “Safety can’t be a priority. Safety is a culture.” At a job site the day before the VPP-C ceremony, Fink observed a site superintendent tell his crew to “find three things that can be corrected in a day. They don’t have to be big things but if we can find three simple things that need to be improved, we’re making a change every day.”



## California Workplace Safety Summit 2025

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## Scripps Project's Golden Gate Employers

Six subcontractors on the Lusardi Tower project in Encinitas have qualified for Cal/OSHA's Golden Gate Recognition Program, which recognizes employers with effective Injury and Illness Prevention Programs. They include:

**Anning-Johnson**, a Hayward contractor specializing in wall systems and other construction services. The company has a 65 experience modification rating (EMR) and has workers' comp insurance from Arch Insurance;



**Anning-Johnson:** l. to r.: Cole Gnadt, project manager, Greg Martinez, safety director, David Leirmoe, foreman, Ricardo Munoz, superintendent and Sergio Nunez, sales manager.

**Bergelectric**, an electrical contractor based in Carlsbad. The employer has a 94 EMR and coverage through Zurich American Insurance;



**Bergelectric:** Jake Bons, project manager Jeff Drost, foreman and Robert Cruz, safety manager.

**Nevell/Standard Joint Venture**, a wall and ceiling contractor based in Corona. It has an 80 EMR and coverage by Insurance Company of the West;



**Nevell/Standard JV:** Chad Hammer, safety, Duane Wright, superintendent, Peter Lupo, safety director, and Kyle Giard, project manager.

**Pacific Southwest Structures (PSSI)**, based in Lemon Grove. The employer has an 82 EMR and is covered through American Casualty;



**PSSI:** Christian Miranda, foreman, Ken Lane, superintendent, Shane Shaughnessy, owner/general superintendent and Sean Flemming, project planner owner development.

**Paragon Steel** (not pictured), headquartered in Commerce, with a 91 EMR and workers' comp through Sentry Insurance; and

**Tower Glass of Santee;** its EMR is 53 and it is covered by Federal Insurance.



**Tower Glass:** Chris Coin, general superintendent, Ron Morrison, project manager and Chris Diaz, foreman.