National Youth Safety Essay Scholarship Contest Winner

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As I was sitting in the guidance office planning my first semester of my exchange year, my host mother and guidance counselor were very surprised when I was excited to sign up for a building and construction course. I never had the opportunity to take a class like this in Belgium and I was excited for the opportunity, especially because I am preparing for a career in architecture. Going into this class I had no idea what OSHA was but now I have learned a lot about the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

OSHA 10-hour has been a part of my life for more than 10 hours; actually I would say something like 15 hours. Being an exchange student and not speaking English as my first language, it was challenging for me to finish this program. But I did it! I could succeed at it because this program makes learning fun and easy and is well designed. By using interactions between different characters and incorporating videos and pictures, the program presents the material in a concrete manner. The program makes complex material accessible and interesting. In this day and age of constant stimulation, engaging students in a task can be difficult. OSHA 10-hour is designed to hold a student's attention. It provides a dynamic balance between dialogues, videos, pictures and real-life applications.

In the future, I would like to major in architecture, so this program has been very helpful to me. After completing the program, I now have a better vision of the potential risks and hazards on a work site. I can detect, identify and classify these risks and be proactive about avoiding hazards. On a work site, the employees must be safe and should not have to put their lives in danger. Through this program, I realized that risks are everywhere and if we are not aware of them it can be very dangerous.

This program also taught me about all of the rights that an employee has and all of the obligations that the employers must respect. OSHA protects employees through laws and regulations. I learned about employee rights that I didn't know existed, for example, how the employees can ask for a complete PPE or ask for different terms in their contracts. The employers also have to provide their employees with all of the necessary protections to be safe. They must provide a decent wage for the work that they do. They must follow specific laws, which are not always easy to implement, to assure good working conditions for their employees.

I have also learned a lot in the area of tools, equipment, work vehicles and specific terminology. For example, I now understand what it means to excavate and what the difference is between caught-in, caught-between and struck-by hazards. Since English is not my first language, this program helped me to become familiar with a lot of the vocabulary of a work site. Someday, if I want to work for an international architecture firm, I will have the base knowledge necessary to apply for these types of jobs.

Despite the fact that this program did require a significant time investment and could be mentally tiring at times, I finished it with a new knowledge of the risks employees in this field face and how I can increase my awareness to avoid danger. What I learned in this program could save my life in my future career. I know that all of the information and explanations that I reviewed during this program will be very helpful to me, whether it is at my job or when I am working on my own house. In addition, after some research I have discovered that OSHA has a presence internationally. For example, in 2012, the Assistant Secretary of Labor addressed a joint EU/US conference in my home city of Brussels. He talked about ways that Europe and the United States are working together to promote new initiatives in the area of occupational safety. OSHA is an organization that will not only help me in my future but it also promotes collaboration between countries, which is at the heart of what it means for me to be an exchange student.

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