



# KWEST GROUP

CIVIL CONSTRUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



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**Testimony of:**

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U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

Safe Workplaces, Stronger Partnerships: The Future of OSHA Compliance Assistance

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Chairman Mackenzie, Ranking Member Omar and Members of the House Committee on Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Workforce Protections:

Thank you for the invitation to testify this morning and for the opportunity to discuss Voluntary Protection Programs and the future of Occupational Safety and Health Administration compliance assistance.

My name is Kevin Sell, and I am the senior manager of corporate development at [Kwest Group](#), a 100% employee-owned company founded in 2003. Kwest Group has grown from its roots in Port Clinton, Ohio, to become a trusted partner across the United States. Today, Kwest Group is licensed in nearly 40 states, boasting a broad geographic presence with seven regional offices and two craft education facilities.

I am testifying on behalf of [Associated Builders and Contractors](#), a national construction trade association with 67 chapters representing more than 23,000 members and millions of workers.

In 2024, Kwest Group was honored as ABC's Contractor of Year. This award recognizes member companies for corporate integrity and commitment to health and safety, professional development and expert workforce development.

I began my career as a firefighter and shift commander, which enhanced my ability to make quick and complex executive decisions throughout my business career. Before joining Kwest Group, I contributed to the significant growth of Century Construction and United Group Services through safety and quality programs, workforce development solutions and relationship management, from 1990 to 2024.

I have also held leadership roles on both the Kentucky Workers' Compensation Funding Commission and the Kentucky Occupational Safety & Health Review Commission, where I served as chair. I hold multiple certifications and continue to maintain ongoing education and training in the field.

The area offices of OSHA have provided employees and employers with valuable expertise and support through Compliance Assistance Specialists and their Challenge Program, which serves as a pathway to the Voluntary Protection Program. By fostering a relationship—or better yet, a partnership—with the area office, employers gain nonenforcement support, allowing them to work collaboratively with OSHA to improve and reduce risk for their teams. This is especially important in construction, as many of us have a mobile workforce that presents a unique set of challenges far different and more complex than most general industry sites.

In 1999, we met with then-Region Five Administrator Mike Connors, who challenged us to adapt ABC's STEP and Challenge Program into a construction version of the Voluntary Protection Program. We began a demonstration program in 2001. VPP, across all industries, allows employers, employees and labor to apply for an audit that can lead to their VPP designation. Many of us refer to the VPP as OSHA's "seal of approval." VPP makes the work environment better and safer and even supports business growth. It is also important to note that positions like the compliance assistance specialist and programs like VPP allow OSHA to focus on bad actors while leveraging their VPP partners as subject matter experts and resources. OSHA standards are the minimum requirement; employees are far better protected under a VPP employer.

Founded in 1989 as a safety benchmarking and improvement tool, [ABC's STEP® Health and Safety Management System](#) has evolved into an industry-leading health and safety management system that demonstrates leadership and cultural transformation among its members, regardless of company size or type of work. Participating ABC member firms measure their safety processes and policies on key components through a detailed questionnaire with the goal of implementing or enhancing health and safety programs that reduce jobsite incident rates. Companies receive a rating of Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze or Participant based on their safety performance. STEP members prove that industry-leading health and safety is achievable with a companywide commitment to health and safety as a core value.

The [2025 ABC Health and Safety Performance Report](#) documents the dramatic impact of deploying proactive health and safety practices—leading indicators such as new hire safety orientation, substance abuse prevention and toolbox talks—to reduce recordable incidents by up to 85%, making the best-performing companies nearly seven times safer than the industry average. The 2025 edition was based on data gathered from ABC STEP participants recording more than 1 billion hours of work in construction, heavy construction, civil engineering and specialty trades.

When I mentor construction companies applying for VPP, I always ask for their STEP level or encourage them to start this process because any company can participate in STEP. STEP was a key factor in creating the VPP for construction, and I continue to find it highly valuable in the application process. STEP has also evolved to include something critically important to all of us in every industry: mental health and suicide prevention. Together, with all other aspects, we now focus on Total Human Health.

As an [OSHA special government employee](#), I have proudly contributed my time and expertise to advancing workplace safety and health for businesses of all sizes. Since 2002, I have participated in numerous construction and general industry approval and re-approval audits as part of OSHA's VPP. Drawing on my diverse background in fire service, aviation and general industry, I have supported OSHA's mission by lending a private sector perspective to on-site evaluations and collaborating with agency staff to strengthen safety and health management systems. This role has allowed me to help employers and employees across a broad spectrum of industries to enhance their workplace environments, achieve VPP recognition and build a culture of continuous improvement. As an SGE, I am honored to be part of a program that not only extends OSHA's resources but also empowers companies of all sizes to prioritize the well-being of their workers and achieve excellence in occupational safety and health.

I look forward to discussing these important issues with the committee today and providing insight into these successful programs.