

benefit fringe

stretching together
breeds unity and fun

Mortenson Construction's longtime practice of holding morning "Bend 'N Stretch" sessions at construction worksites received some major media attention recently, likely because of the large number of participants working on a high-profile project.

More than 500 yellow-vested and hardhat-clad workers at the construction site of the new basketball arena for the Milwaukee Bucks gather each morning for a mass stretching session in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Mortenson is the construction manager for the project. These same sessions occur at jobsites across the country, from remote wind farms to large, urban high-rises.

"We're trying to make the body more alert, more ready to start physical activity," said Mel Langlais, safety director for Mortenson's Milwaukee office. There's no hard data to support that the sessions reduce work-related injuries, but company injury rates have continually improved from year to year, she said.

"The culture message is probably the thing workers appreciate the most," Langlais noted. "When you stretch together, from a visual standpoint, it creates unity. It doesn't matter if you're an ironworker or an electrical worker. We all start the day together, we're all together, and that's the message."



Workers at the construction site for the new basketball arena for the Milwaukee Bucks begin every morning with a "Bend 'N Stretch" session.



Officials with the project's construction manager say the morning sessions help set the tone for the day.

The bend-and-stretch sessions started about 20 years ago and were updated about three years ago to make sure they applied to the types of work on all kinds of projects. Workers go through a series of ten stretches, including shoulder rolls, leg swings and squats.

The 15-minute morning gatherings also include discussions about what happened on the project the day before, issues that have arisen and what work is expected to be completed that day. "Everyone knows what's going on throughout the day so they can be successful. Communication is probably the most important part of stretching."

It's not a stretch to say that fun is another important component. About five or six years ago, the company's solar division started stretching to music, adding laughter into the mix. Others followed suit.

Many construction sites have added "wiggle in the middle," the trademark move of one of Mortenson's general foremen, to their routine. Langlais describes it as a hula-hoop movement that provides comic relief.

"The whole workforce yells. It's just a way to make coming to work more fun. Workers do very physically demanding, stressful work. It releases a lot of stress. It's not a holy grail—It doesn't fix everything. But, for us, starting the day together is a positive, fun way of setting the tone."