

# **The Impact of Safety Legislation in the Construction Sector in Trinidad and Tobago**

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## **Abstract**

Trinidad and Tobago is one of the more industrialised Commonwealth Caribbean island states with a fairly well-developed range of construction activities. Nevertheless, independent study of the construction sector began in earnest only in 1970. For the decade 1974 – 1983, the country witnessed unprecedented economic growth as demonstrated by a 20-fold increase in the GDP, based exclusively on the upward movement of oil prices in the period. There was a literal construction boom during this period, which had come to a discernible halt by 1985. The paper attempts first to review the body of legislation which preceded the construction boom with specific reference to safety within the construction sector. The review then seeks to study the legislative regime within the same ambit from the boom to the present.

The range of documents is very scant, to say the least, and while the study has revealed that there were several attempts to improve the legislative coverage in the area, these attempts have not passed into law. The last three decades have seen an accompanying and progressive increase in construction accidents and deaths, the loss of productivity due to loss of man-hours, ineffective working practices, unnecessary damage to adjoining property or to works under construction demand intervention. These would argue most eloquently for a serious redirection of the legislative focus on industrial accidents and the health and safety of workers in general, and of the construction sector in particular.

The trade union movement, the construction professional associations, the insurance companies and the Ministries of Industry and Commerce as well as Labour must take stock.