

Construction

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Safety depends on attitude not legislation



The John Holland Group believes that if the leadership team sets a more robust approach in the way safety is treated, it will help employees see that supervisors are taking the matter seriously.

By **DEBORAH SINGERMAN**

THE construction industry's site safety record is far from enviable. "Compensated fatalities are more than double the (overall) industry rate", according to a report from the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) 2004 conference on improving safety in the building and construction industry.

In an international comparison of fatal occupational injuries, mainly in European countries and Australia and New Zealand during the late 1990s and 2000-2001, Australia's record in construction was worse than all except the United Kingdom and Germany.

"The incidence of construction workplace injury remains much higher than the national industry average with workplace fatalities at an unacceptable level," says Jim Barrett, secretary of the Australian Constructors Association (ACA), which represents the nation's major contractors. "The answer is not in further draconian legislation but in looking for reasons why people act in

the way they do in a dangerous industry."

With this in mind, the ACA has given its full support to a two-year research project by the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation into site safety culture. The project, with an expected completion date of October 2006, will focus on skills, attitudes, behaviour and commitment – what happens on site – rather than regulations, legislation and technology.

Project team leader Dean Cipolla, group safety manager at the John Holland Group, has seen it all too often on construction sites. "You can have similar projects, with similar trades, similar structures, similar safety management systems accredited to various standards or local legislation.

"Yet one project will have a really good safety record and approach and the other project isn't the best, varying from average to downright terrible. What makes that difference? The people and how they lead, apply, commit and own occupational health and safety," he says.

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Hammer head tower crane services Sydney CBD site

Safety depends on attitude

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The CRCCI project will identify:

- ☐ Which management and supervisory positions with a construction company/project are critical to safety performance (safety critical positions).
- ☐ What types of competencies/skills/knowledge/behaviours are required to shape the understanding, attitudes, behavioural competencies, norms and commitment of line management and supervision to site/project safety and safety culture.
- ☐ What type of training packages and learning tools are in place and their effectiveness to individual site and industry OHS outcomes and safety performance.

Funded \$650,000 in cash and kind, the project (as with CRC projects generally) has a minimum of two industry partners and two research partners.

Cipolla is particularly pleased about this level of NOHSC involvement. "Ultimately we want this research to lead into the creation of an industry standard for safety critical positions and required competencies."