

BUILDING INNOVATIONS

Safety culture initiative launched



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WE ARE all aware of the unenviable track record of site safety in this country. Construction is recognised as one of Australia's most dangerous industries for workers. The personal losses through death, injury and disease are both tragic and costly; the many thousands of compensation claims per year cost millions of dollars for the government and construction companies.

Improving this situation faces two main barriers that have created inconsistent messages about site safety: the ongoing movement of

subcontractors and the workforce between construction companies, projects and sites, and the widely varying interpretations of safety competency.

A Construction Innovation initiative offers a practical approach for solving these industry challenges and improving OH&S through safety culture. A Construction Safety Competency Framework: improving OH&S performance by creating and maintaining a safety culture is an industry-driven publication resulting from the Construction Innovation research project 'Construction Site Safety Culture'. It targets safety managers, senior managers and executives and others concerned with the safety culture of the industry.

A high level of industry input and involvement was assured by having the project team lead by John Holland's Dean Cipolla and basing much of the research on numerous focus groups, interviews and surveys held with construction organisations. The extent of this engagement is reflected in the Federal Safety Commissioner, Tom

Fisher, commending the publication. Under the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Act 2005, he is responsible for promoting occupational health and safety in the construction industry.

An accepted standardised competency framework (founded on safety culture principles) will be critical to reducing the problems faced by construction organisations when dealing with OH&S performance of subcontractors and a mobile workforce. It is the intention that A Construction Safety Competency Framework form the basis for a future industry-wide Code of Practice.

In brief, the framework identifies safety-critical positions such as senior manager, engineer and site OH&S advisor, and the safety management tasks they need to be able to perform competently. For each task, the steps, knowledge, skills and behaviours required to complete it with competence are outlined in detail.

Given that construction organisations are at various stages

of safety system development, the framework should be customised to suit the needs of individual organisations. It also needs to become part of the organisation's HRM and OH&S management procedures through existing and new employee selection and recruitment methods as well as training and performance management processes. Once these are achieved, the framework is well on the way to being effectively implemented and becoming part of a process that ensures continuous improvement.

The Construction Innovation project team comprised representatives from industry, government and research: John Holland, Bovis Lend Lease, Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner, Queensland University of Technology, and University of Western Sydney.

To obtain a copy of A Construction Safety Competency Framework (or its executive summary) launched by the Hon Kevin Andrews, Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in Melbourne on September 22, refer to www.construction-innovation.info ■