

Construction gets new safety framework

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A NEW workplace safety framework aimed at bringing about long-term cultural and behavioural changes towards safety on Australian construction sites has been launched today in Melbourne by federal Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews.

The framework developed by the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation is designed to improve occupational health and safety practices in the building and construction industry.



Andrews said with an estimated average of one fatality a week on Australian construction sites and thousands of serious injuries reported by the industry each year, it is time to address the attitudes and behaviours towards safety.

"A standardised safety framework makes it possible for the industry as a whole to proactively improve the behaviours and attitudes of the site managers who influence safety on construction sites the most," Andrews said.

The framework is a key recommendation of the report, A Construction Safety Competency Framework, produced by project team members Dr Herbert Biggs and Vaughn Sheahan from the Queensland University of Technology; Dr Don Dingsdag of the University of Western Sydney; Wayne Artuso from the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner; Dean Cipolla of John Holland Group; and Linda Sokolich and Danny Potocki from Bovis Lend Lease.

The report is a culmination of two years of industry research across the Australian construction industry and received input from industry stakeholders, government and unions.

Project leader Dean Cipolla, safety manager with John Holland Group, said the transient nature of the construction industry had contributed to the high number of deaths and injuries across the industry.

"Many Australian construction sites have poor safety culture, which has contributed to a fatality rate more than five times higher than the mining industry not to mention many thousands of avoidable injuries," Cipolla said.

"Labour mobility makes it difficult for any one company to consistently influence safety attitudes and behaviours because workers and subcontractors hear different safety messages when they move to different companies, projects and sites.

"In addition, the sector traditionally has not viewed behaviours such as communication and leadership as a necessary part of safety competency."

The Construction Safety Competency Framework is designed to be used by safety managers, senior managers and executives providing a guide on how to create a positive culture by ensuring key staff such as project managers, supervisors and OH&S advisors and engineers are aware of and can effectively execute tasks needed to manage OH&S.

CRC Construction Innovation chairman John McCarthy said the idea behind the framework was to develop a more world-class industry program that would bring unions, government, researchers and the private sector together to make construction sites safer for workers.