

John Holland takes the lead in construction safety

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POOR performance in the safety arena by the construction sector has led a major industry group to develop a safety program that has caught the eye of many other industry players. The John Holland Group revealed its "No Harm" vision to the construction industry some 15 months ago and it has been gaining momentum ever since.

The group's No Harm vision underpins its comprehensive national Passport to Safety Excellence Training Program – which focuses on behaviour, approach and culture.

According to group safety manager Dean Cipolla, for a program to work it must address not just skill competencies, but also behavioural competencies.

Construction companies can teach their employees mechanical skills, but for a person to be effective in their role they must have a certain type of behaviour and approach to the task at hand.

Cipolla likens the concept to Kevin Costner's 1989 film *Field of Dreams* quoting a line from the movie: "Build it and they will come."

"Build the person's behaviours, and the mechanical skills are easy," he said.

According to Cipolla, there are no real competency-based safety training programs that are recognised nationally, and by other companies, that can provide workers with behavioural skills and can prove they are competent in a specific area.

"Our industry is long overdue and the perfect example I suppose ... is a forklift operator needs a ticket to prove that they're competent to operate a forklift, yet within the construction industry you can have a project manager, a supervisor, [or] a general manager that doesn't have to prove they are competent and there's nothing available to these people to give them the competencies that they need to manage safely," he said.

"Our industry's performance is not good and we should be moving mountain and earth to get better. We all are in isolation, it's about time we came together as an industry."

John Holland got the ball rolling with the introduction of its Passport program, which provides all workers – from a leading hand through to the managing director – with skills, knowledge and behaviours that will build understanding.

"With understanding comes real ownership, instead of just lip-service," Cipolla said.

A key difference in John Holland's Passport program is the encouragement of active participation as opposed to just passive learning.

A component of the program includes hypothetical scenarios where a solicitor questions employees on how they would handle a particular situation.

The program is not simply lecturing and PowerPoint presentations, but a mix of adult learning, workshops, situational awareness case studies, and group work.

The introduction of the program generated quite a bit of industry interest, according to Cipolla.

John Holland subcontractors began requesting to participate in the program, other companies questioned how they could get their hands on the framework, and the program received numerous endorsements – from the Federal Safety Commissioner, who has also used it as an industry case study for best practice, Leighton Holdings chief Wal King, and the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation.

This resulted in Cipolla leading a research project, funded by the CRC for Construction Innovation, to develop an industry framework based on John Holland's Passport program.

The new safety framework was launched in September last year by federal Minister for Workplace Relations Kevin Andrews.

At the launch of the framework Cipolla 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 a 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," he said.

John Holland's Passport program and the new industry specific safety framework go above and beyond just meeting legislative requirements, according to Cipolla.

"It goes well and truly above. John Holland has ... a belief that legislative compliance is just a licence to operate. If we just focus on compliance we will never get better. This program is focused on leading practice ... and a No Harm philosophy," he said.

While John Holland has invested well over \$1 million in the safety program, Cipolla said the company did not develop the program to profit from it.

"We're not in it to make money out of it, but we certainly want to build our brand," he said.

John Holland is still slightly reserved as to how the new framework will be implemented.

Cipolla said the company was cautious about how the framework would end up in industry because it did not want the key behavioural principles eroded away, returning the program to just another "mechanical process".

John Holland conducted a culture perception survey, completed late last year, which indicated the program was being well received.

According to Cipolla, lag indicators have shown steady improvement across the company.

"Just the level of interaction in the workplace, the level of addressing of risks, and the seriousness with which safety is treated now is just a huge difference to what it was three years ago," he said.

John Holland plans to continue conducting culture perception surveys every six months to measure the program's success.

The next step for John Holland's Passport program is for it to be rolled out to its 1200 safety critical positions, with Stage 2 following soon after.

Stage 2 will see John Holland's blue collar and subcontract workforce trained in the program.



John Holland group safety manager Dean Cipolla