



Australian Government

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner

CRC for Construction Innovation
Site Safety Culture Project Launch

Docklands, Melbourne

12:00pm - 22 September 2006

Thank you for inviting me to speak today and thank you Bill for putting perspective on the building and construction industry and the safety issues it is facing today.

As you are aware, my role as Federal Safety Commissioner is to promote and improve occupational health and safety in the building and construction industry.

My role came out of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the building and construction industry.

The Royal Commission found the current occupational health and safety performance record of the building and construction industry to be substandard. Based on the royal Commissions recommendations, the Australian Government decided to use its influence not only as a legislator and policy member but also as a major procurer of services in the industry, to promote and enhance Occupational Health and Safety performance.

The construction industry makes up 8% of the Australian workforce but accounts for more than 15% of all fatalities in the workplace. As mentioned by Bill, the Australian Safety and Compensation Council has just released

figures for 2003 – 2004 which estimate that 52 traumatic injury deaths occurred that year in the construction sector. This represents a 6.7 fatality rate per 100,000. This figure is probably even higher when you take into account disease-related deaths. This is unacceptable.

But more importantly, for years the safety culture within the construction industry has been ordinary - to say the least.

The Goals of my Office are to:

- Improve safety on building and construction sites;
- Foster a new approach where work must be performed safely;
- Have a positive impact on the industry's culture; and
- Promote a high level of OHS management in building and construction – not only on Australian Government projects but across all projects.

My Office works closely with other Commonwealth agencies and industry to ensure that projects are delivered not only on time and on budget, but safely.

The biggest and most important project for us has been the establishment of the Australian Government Building and Construction OHS Accreditation Scheme, which was established by the BCIIA 2005. The legislation makes it clear that any person who wants to contract for building and construction work with an Australian Government agency will need to be accredited. The Government agency, or client, is not able to enter into a contract with a non-accredited contractor.

The Australian Government OHS Accreditation Scheme is simply one example of the government using its influence as a client and provider of capital to improve the construction industry's OHS performance. It is also simply a means to an end, not the end itself.

I have identified six focus points which we consider to be essential to improving OHS performance in the building and construction industry.

- (1) Demonstrated senior management commitment to OHS;
- (2) Integration of safe design into the risk management project;
- (3) Whole-of-project consultation and communications;
- (4) Demonstrated effective subcontractor OHS management;
- (5) Whole-of-project performance management; and
- (6) OHS training requirements.

These focus points are used when auditing contractors for accreditation.

As Minister Andrews has mentioned, we must get behind and encourage research within the building and construction industry on safety culture and OHS issues.

I am developing a set of Safety Principles and Guidance for improving OHS in the building and construction industry which will give perspective in creating a national consistency in OHS practices. These Safety Principles and Guidance aim to encourage all participants to strive for a higher level of safety.

The Safety Principles and Guidance will be released shortly.

The principles include the need for industry to:

- (1) Demonstrate a tangible commitment to developing a safety culture;
 - (2) Maintain effective OHS measures across a project's life cycle;
 - (3) Strive to develop cooperative business relationships;
 - (4) Ensure safe design and constructability is considered;
 - (5) Effective consultation and communication;
 - (6) Systematically approach OHS & Risk management;
 - (7) Demonstrate OHS leadership at all stages of the construction project;
- and
- (8) Monitor, report and benchmark OHS at all levels.

What we are here to do today is launch a project that will help move the building and construction industry away from an unacceptable safety culture and closer to a new culture of safer workplaces.

What we need to do is get the industry to change – and more importantly, to **want** to change. My Office can be a catalyst for change, but without the engagement of industry, we will struggle to make a difference.

As Bill has expressed, achieving OHS, through cultural change is the only answer. Safety is a value and not just a priority. We shouldn't talk about safety as a 'number one priority' but rather as a deeply held value that remains constant throughout business.

I expect major players like you in the industry, to take this opportunity, to embrace and drive cultural change and foster innovative approaches to OHS.

Those involved in the project we are launching today have shown the kind of leadership and commitment that is needed. They have worked together in developing a framework which in turn will be useful to those out in the industry to help achieve a safety culture on construction sites.

Improving OHS is a shared responsibility. Everybody associated with the industry has a role to play. By working together we are able to share experiences and identify issues which we can build on and improve across the board. I want to give a commitment that I and my office will work with industry towards that improvement and I invite the industry to use us, and engage with us, to identify the way we can work together.

I would like to congratulate all those involved in this project for making cultural change within the building and construction industry a priority, as it is for the Australian Government.

Thank you.