ACA SAFETY INITIATIVE – RELEASE OF REPORTS ON SAFETY IN DESIGN AND HEALTH AND SAFETY CULTURE

OVERVIEW

The Australian Constructors Association (ACA) has now released two very important reports commissioned by the ACA and prepared by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology as part of the ACA's Safety Initiative. The ACA is also completing a number of guides and documents to assist the industry to further improve its approach to safety issues. These are described in greater detail below.

AUSTRALIAN WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGY 2012-2022

The ACA's Safety Initiative has been ongoing for some time. However, the current reports and other material have been generated in part to assist industry to meet the expectations contained in the release by Safe Work Australia in 2012 of the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022

The Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy sets out seven action areas to achieve the vision and outcomes of the Strategy and, as you will see, the ACA Safety Initiative takes up those action areas for the purpose of achieving long lasting and practical improvements in the safety of our industry and for all of those associated with it.

Importantly, the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy identifies the need to sustain consistent attention and effort on key areas in order to achieve improvement.

The Strategy notes that reviews have highlighted the importance of developing and monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation process. It has also been identified that we need to expand the scope of involvement in implementation beyond government regulators to include collaborative partnerships between all parties with an interest in work health and safety.

The ACA fully supports the Strategy's approach and the proposal in the Strategy that individual organisations and workplaces, professional associations and interest groups should undertake supporting strategic activities.

Obviously, this would include clients, industry associations, subcontractors, the unions and manufacturers and suppliers amongst others and, clearly, that is why you are here this evening.

Importantly, the Strategy not only contains the key principles behind achieving safe workplaces, it also sets clear outcomes, targets, performance indicators and action areas for industry to work with to take this important issue to the next stage.

The Strategy's seven action areas designed to achieve its vision and outcomes are as follows:

- Healthy and safe by design
- Supply chains and networks
- Health and safety capabilities
- Leadership and culture
- Research and evaluation
- Government; and
- Responsive and effective regulatory framework

The ACA takes the 2012-2022 Strategy very seriously and that is why we have taken upon ourselves a leading role in the development of responses to the Strategy that we believe will assist individuals and small, medium and large businesses to improve safety across the industry.

ACA SAFETY INITIATIVE

The ACA Safety Initiative identified a number of milestones aimed at leading the industry to the development of safer workplaces. As part of this approach, the ACA engaged RMIT to undertake work aimed at addressing three of the ACA's identified safety milestones. They are:

- Undertake a study of the impact of Australian culture on work, health and safety
- Develop a health and safety culture framework
- Research and publish a paper on construction design and planning best practice

Health and Safety Culture
The first two milestones are addressed in the RMIT report titled "Health and Safety Culture".

What we wanted RMIT to do was to research the impact of culture and the operation of culture at a national, industry and organisational level because the culture existing in a workplace and within an organisation plays such an important part in identifying and managing safety issues.

We wanted a report that would inform individuals and enterprises of cultural issues and the actions they should take to address the cultural impact on their assessment of safety risks.

We also wanted RMIT to develop a Safety Cultural Framework which specified the attributes of a "good" safety culture at the organisational, project and work group levels so that all in the industry would be able to apply those attributes to their workplaces.

Lastly, we tasked RMIT to develop a Safety Culture Assessment Tool which would include a safety climate assessment instrument and a safety culture maturity model to assist individuals and enterprises to undertake their own culture assessment processes.

We have now tasked RMIT to validate their assessment tool through surveys and interaction with ACA member companies and employees to ensure that the tool will be fit for purpose and use by any individual or business in the industry.

Following completion of the validation process over coming months we will then release the tool for general industry use at no cost to industry participants.

The ACA member organisations believe that if the industry is able to effectively address cultural issues at workplaces we will be headed for a significant improvement in the incidence of injuries and fatalities.

Safety in Design
The second RMIT report released is titled "Safety in Design". This report complements and supports the safety culture report.

Safety in design has been around for some time and we all know that it is embedded in workplace health and safety legislation around the country. Further, many industry associations and professional bodies are fully engaged in implementing the concept.

However, ACA members believe that while the industry has embraced the safety in design concept and developed a range of tools, guides and processes, the industry has not yet fully resolved the issue in terms of the interaction between designer, constructor and client.

This is where arguments about cost, aesthetics and practicality often bump together against safety responsibilities, but they do not need to be an issue if handled appropriately.

In other words, having the tools, knowledge and capacity to design safely is very important, but it also requires ongoing effective and timely stakeholder engagement and effective information management to achieve the benefits that may flow from safe design.

ACA wanted RMIT to examine these issues and produce a report that identified existing work and legislative responsibilities in this important area, but which also identified how other processes could be used as an aid by all stakeholders to implement effective safety in design initiatives and to enable industry to bring these issues to the attention of our stakeholders.

We want the industry as a whole to have regard to the impact of design on safety at each level of a project, whether it is an electrician designing a better way to wire a house or an engineer or architect designing a multi storey building or infrastructure project.

These are issues that transcend legislation and industry codes and go to the heart of project management and control.

Further Safety Initiative Guides
To complement the concepts identified in the safety culture and safety in design reports, the ACA will, in coming months, release a suite of additional materials for industry to use to further improve its approach to safety in general. These will include:

- First, a glossary of safety terms designed to be a user friendly guide to common definitions in legislation, codes and other materials. This document is meant to inform and assist industry participants to understand the various safety concepts that they may otherwise have to search for. Obviously, this issue would be greatly assisted by the finalisation of fully harmonised safety legislation and we will continue to pursue this with our legislators.

- Second, a guide containing a suite of positive (or lead) indicators of safety performance that may be implemented by industry participants to suit their specific business models, and hopefully to achieve a more consistent and proactive approach to safety by implementing processes that will eliminate the risk of safety incidents rather than the current predominately reactive approach of examining what went wrong after a person has been injured.

- Third, a leadership and competencies framework to assist businesses to assess the appropriate roles and functions of those responsible for safety at the various levels of their organisation, and then to identify the appropriate training and skills that those persons should obtain to be effective in their positions. This will also include a draft skills matrix and guidance material that businesses may use to assist them in their assessment.

- Fourth, we are also reviewing the suite of guides currently contained in the ACA website and will update and re-issue those that we feel need to be adjusted. These will be reviewed and released progressively commencing with the re-issuing of the eight electrical guides around the end of August this year.

Industry Engagement and Commitment
A whole of industry approach is required to achieve quantum changes in the approach to safety. This will take time but is a highly desirable and worthwhile outcome for all concerned. The ACA will now commence a full engagement process with our stakeholders and partners to work with them to achieve what we hope will be some really significant reductions in safety incidents right across the industry and its supply chain.

As part of this process we will release the additional guides and information papers as soon as possible but will ensure that industry is appropriately consulted on relevant documentation as we would like to see these concepts embraced across the industry rather than have them imposed through other means.

We will also work with our legislators, our safety regulators, our clients and all of our stakeholders to assist in achieving the key performance indicators contained in the Safe Work Australia Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy.

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