

Panel update on health & safety issues

IStructE's Health and Safety Panel has been kept busy with a variety of important issues reports Chairman, Mark Crosby (F)

IStructE's Health and Safety Panel was created by the Engineering Practice Committee about 2 years ago to consider more formally the various issues the Institution raised relating to health and safety. The topic was at that time being addressed within a number of committees and it was felt more appropriate to bring it under one responsibility reporting to the Engineering Practice Committee.

Representation on this Panel consists of up to 15 members, including the Health and Safety Executive and legal representation when required. Panel members come from a complete cross section of membership including academia and have occasionally been joined by members overseas. Within the Panel there are specialist health and safety advisors as well as CDM Co-ordinators (Planning Supervisors), designers, manufacturers and clients. The Panel is supported by Ben Cresswell Riol at the Institution and he can be contacted by any member needing advice or other information*.

Its first few meetings concentrated on the more urgent issues such as the impending CDM revisions, Designer Competency, CSCS Cards and Designer Guidelines and Advice Notes such as the SiD (Safety in Design) Documents.

More recently the Panel has discussed Respect for People, CROSS, the Health and Safety Register being managed by the Institution of Civil Engineers, CPD and Advice to be given to universities for students learning health and safety in construction.

Much as been written in the press and in particular in the Journal regarding the revised CDM Regulations 2007 (see p15, 24).

During 2006 panel members had high level meetings with the Health and Safety Executive as well as with the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers. The panel also made a written representation on the CDM Regulations and these new regulations were supported by the Institution particularly with the further enhancement of the duties of the CDM Co-ordinator.

Designer competency is a big issue within our membership and again

much has been written on this. I urge members to look at John Carpenter's paper on designer's competency as this is supported by the Institution (web: www.citb/cdm).

The Panel has debated the involvement of Health and Safety Inspectors across the country and their understanding of the construction process. An initiative has been set up to enable both inspectors and designers to be more aware of health and safety issues related to the construction industry and responsibility for those issues. With this in mind Health and Safety Inspectors have offered to visit consultancy offices to discuss with designers construction and design processes and share experiences between them (see panel).

The Panel discussed at some length the various designers' guidelines for health and safety and found that in many instances excellent pieces of guidance were available. Examples are from:

- SiD (www.safetyindesign.org);
- British Constructional Steelwork Association guidance on safe delivery and unloading of steel products and other matters related to steel erection and much other general guidance (www.steelconstruction.org).

The Panel therefore felt new guidance was not necessary and decided that it would monitor the various guidance documents available to members. More recently the Panel has discussed how the Institution can assist with CROSS (Confidential Reporting of Structural Safety). It advises members of its importance through technical evening meetings and other meetings at HQ, promoting such events on the web to enable general access to the members. It is crucial that CROSS continues to enable bad practice and product deficiencies to be identified which will, in turn, allow potential hazards to be identified and reduced (see CROSS's latest report on p20).

The Panel is reviewing the new Construction Health, Safety & Welfare Register, supported by several members who have high level involvement with health and safety. They would be recognised for this additional responsibility by being on the Register.

One of the most important aspects of health and safety is to ensure communication with members. A quick link to health and safety has been provided on the Institution's website (<http://www.istructe.org/HealthandSafety>) which then allows members to look at the current issues. Health and safety issues are also communicated through the Journal. SE

- Further information, views or comments to Ben Cresswell Riol at IStructE: (email: ben.cresswell.riol@istructe.org).

DESIGNER / HSE LIAISON

Gordon Reid, Cundall Johnston & Partners LLP, writes:

Following HSE's 'Take your Designer to Site Initiatives' IStructE suggested that HSE Construction Inspectors may benefit from a similar exercise by visiting designers' offices to learn about the design process. Dr David Lilley, Chairman, IStructE Northern Counties Branch, emailed for volunteers to participate in this pilot exercise and a couple of clicks later we were signed up.

The key objective was to engage the HSE with structural engineering designers to enable inspectors to understand more fully how health and safety can be integrated into the design process. This will equip the inspector to talk to designers with a greater degree of understanding and confidence.

Two inspectors were invited to our offices in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for a day with a view to covering the following issues:

- concept, how a project develops;
- contractual arrangements, including the client's contract with the designer, the procurement route, and forms of contract;
- how health and safety influences design;
- the importance of other design factors to the engineer/designer;
- the narrow breadth of responsibility that an individual engineer/designer or single member of the professional team may have;
- the multi-disciplinary nature of most design projects;
- how the team can deliver competence;
- the path of communication, within the team and to contractors, etc.;
- other regulator issues, e.g. Building Regs/Planning, etc.

We set an agenda for the day and attempted to cover as many of the above as possible by showing the inspectors examples from our current portfolio of work. This ensured that they had the opportunity to discuss health & safety issues with a number of our designers which also helped to further promote this issue within our office.

We also invited the inspectors to join us at an external design team meeting with the client, end users, architect, quantity surveyor, CDM co-ordinator and building services engineer all present. This was particularly well received by the inspectors and it highlighted to them the different roles and responsibilities of the team and the complexities of engaging and co-ordinating with so many parties.

Interestingly, initially there was a little reticence amongst some of the team to invite the inspectors to the meeting as there were some fears that this initiative was an 'audit process'. This scheme is an educational one and once this was fully understood these concerns were allayed and the meeting was embraced by all of the participants.

As a practice we enjoyed taking part in the initiative and also benefited from the experience and expertise of the inspectors. During the day we received some feedback which has led to improvements in our hazard assessment procedures and also some advice relating to our risk assessment procedure for staff working out of the office.

From a wider perspective, the benefits of designers engaging with inspectors are obvious and will enable sharing of knowledge to the benefit of the construction industry. We would recommend the initiative to other designers and encourage wider participation in this forward thinking scheme.