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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONIAC)

SMALL CONSTRUCTION FIRMS REPRESENTATION AND INVOLVEMENT WITH HSC/E

A paper by the Federation of Master Builders

Issue

1. Existing arrangements within HSE and CONIAC may not allow for adequate discussion on strategic issues affecting construction micro and SMEs. CONIAC could assist HSE in its review of its SME Engagement Strategy.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendation

3. That an ad-hoc CONIAC SME Working Group be established to assist HSE in producing an SME Engagement Strategy.

Background

4. Prior to CONIAC in its present constitution, HSE supported a Small Firms Working Party (SFWP) as a sub-committee to CONIAC.

5. SFWP formation was brought about at the request of The Federation Of Master Builders (FMB) and was also attended and supported by representatives from the National Federation of Builders and several smaller trade associations.

6. When CONIAC was re-constituted to deal with issues in a more strategic manner, SFWP was not re-constituted. Although FMB participates in the Small Business Trade Association Forum (SBTAF), chaired by HSC Commissioner for Small Business - Judith Donovan - and finds this grouping both valuable and progressive in making alliances with other trade bodies and learning about wider health & safety issues, time limitations and the

multiple-sector approach prohibit dealing with the types of issues often unique and compelling to the construction industry.

7. CONIAC's current focus on micro and SMEs (hereafter referred to as SMEs) is the Working Well Together (WWT) Steering Group. WWT is a result of a CONIAC initiative in 1998 (launched in 1999) to provide an opportunity for all those with an interest in construction to play their part to further improve the health and safety performance of the industry. The campaign has a particular focus on SMEs. The WWT Steering Group agrees priorities for the WWT Campaign and assists HSE in co-ordinating the activities of the 14 industry led regional WWT Groups. Not all parts of the country have active regional groups.

8. No one regulator/industry initiative is able to adequately address the varying needs and characteristics of the significantly diverse construction SME audience. To address this, HSE's Construction Division has recently set up a project to review HSE's current arrangements with construction SMEs and to propose a more effective SME engagement strategy for the construction sector. A key theme of this will be to further develop partnership working within the industry.

Argument

Small firms' perception of HSE and health and safety issues

9. It is FMB's view that there remains a barrier between many small construction firms and HSE, in so much as they see HSE as an organisation to be avoided at all costs and are not aware of the assistance HSE can provide in an advisory role to help achieve health and safety compliance and better practice.

10. FMB accepts that HSE has done much to address small firms' reticence to engage via initiatives such as Working Well Together (WWT) and Safety & Health Awareness Days (SHADs). However there is still much work to be done.

What can HSC/E do for small construction-industry-related firms?

11. FMB firmly believes that in engaging with HSE we improve awareness, compliance and practice among our member firms. Obviously though, engagement is a two-way street and a small and medium construction firms dedicated high-level forum sends out a message to all players in the construction industry that both HSE, the industry and their trade association representatives take health & safety industry issues seriously and are actively engaged in raising standards.

What can small firms and their trade associations do to improve compliance and practice?

12. Trade associations already do much to disseminate health & safety information to their member firms. For example FMB:

- fully participates in SHADS;
- supports WWT;
- contributes to CONIAC and associated working groups;
- operates a national level in-house health and safety committee to review health and safety issues and direct initiatives within the organization;

- supports health & safety committees within the Construction Industry Training Board;
- has operated Worker Safety Advisor (WSA) schemes both within the pilot programme and been successful in bidding for and running schemes within the (WSA) Challenge Fund Programme;
- publishes dedicated “Fact Sheets”; and
- publishes articles in our monthly member’s magazine which all 13,000 members receive.

13. Despite all of the above, we are very aware that all is not yet perfect in the world of health and safety and we recognise that support for HSE awareness campaigns, priority programmes, engagement with other stakeholder organisations to share, learn and explore new ways of raising awareness and disseminating information are vital to the ongoing task to promote compliance and improvements.

14. The FMB sees initiatives in worker involvement, occupational health schemes, personal responsibilities, training in general and management and operative competence as some of the areas which we feel work can be done which will prove beneficial.

15. What can small construction firms’ representatives do on a wider front to promote health and safety compliance and good practice throughout the industry?

16. We realise that HSE and other regulatory bodies do not find it easy to engage small and micro firms and very particularly those firms who are not within a recognised trade association.

Need for a SME Working Group

17. Construction Division’s review of HSE’s current engagement with construction SMEs provides an ideal opportunity for CONIAC to actively anticipate in the development of a more effective SME engagement strategy for the construction industry.

18. FMB considers that a dedicated working group would help this work. Addressing health and safety issues from a small construction firm perspective can help to raise awareness throughout the small firms sector, in that there would be a forum which moved the dialogue in both directions.

19. However, a new, small construction firm forum must consist of organisations that can deliver initiatives and not just talk about them, as, although most or all stakeholders will agree on the philosophy of promoting excellence in all matters health and safety, not all organisations are capable of delivery. However, we believe that there is a sufficient number of trade associations, professional bodies and other stakeholders that are identifiable as motivated, conscientious and able to deliver significant positive outcomes within a small construction firms grouping.

Consultation

20. CONIAC Members, i.e. Chris Tisi, Paul Hayward, HSE’s Construction Division and the Federation of Master Builders.

Action

21. If formation of a small construction firms' working group takes place, FMB will be pleased to assist by taking an active part in identifying stakeholders and bringing them on board.

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