Safety in the Construction Industry

Do you have experience of a safety issue or have concerns that should be shared for the benefit of others? If so we encourage you to visit our Confidential Reporting page.

Since our first newsletter last December there have been several events that have raised serious concerns about safety in the construction industry. The Opal Tower Investigation Final Report, published in February by the NSW Government, while focusing on the issues with this particular building, makes the following general recommendations:

- Creation of a Registry of Engineers managed by Government in partnership with the appropriate professional body;
- Independent third party certification of engineering designs by a Registered Engineer;
- A mandated regime of critical stage, on-site inspections by an independent Registered Engineer;
- Raise transparency through the creation of an open repository for all certifications;
- Creation of a Building Structure Review Board to review major incidents of design and construction related structural damage to buildings.

In March, the Building Ministers Forum (BMF) published its Implementation Plan for the recommendations in the Shergold & Weir Building Confidence report. As a result of concerns about the implementation of the National Construction Code (NCC), the BMF had appointed independent experts, Professor Peter Shergold and Ms Bronwyn Weir, to investigate the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement systems for the building and construction Industry across Australia. Their report, submitted to the BMF in February 2018, highlighted a wide range of problems resulting in recommendations that cover:

- registration and training of practitioners;
- roles and responsibilities of regulators;
- integrity of private building surveyors;
- collecting and sharing building information and intelligence;
- adequacy of documentation and record keeping;
- on-site inspection regimes;
- post-construction information management;
- building product safety.

And in December 2018 the Senate Economics References Committee published its report Non-conforming building products: the need for a coherent and robust regulatory regime. This includes as one of its many recommendations (no.2 at 3.74): that the Australian Government develop a confidential reporting mechanism through which industry and other stakeholders can report non-conforming building products.

These reports raise serious concerns about the construction industry and to quote Shergold & Weir: It is our considered view that the nature and extent of the problems put to us are significant and concerning. They are likely to undermine public trust in the health and safety of buildings if they are not addressed in a comprehensive manner.

It is important that we as Structural Engineers play our part in restoring confidence in our industry.

CROSS-AUS supports many of the recommendations in the above reports and provides a vehicle whereby we can all contribute towards improving quality and safety by publishing confidential reports and disseminating advice on good practice.

CROSS-AUS Panel

We are pleased to welcome on board our first Panel members - John Gaskin, Richard Morgan, John Stella, Geoff Taplin, George Walker, Glen Warwick and John Woodside. Their details are on the People page of our website. The Panel will increase in time as needs and demands require, and if you are interested in becoming a Panel member please let us know at administrator@cross-aus.org.au.
Engineered Safety Symposium

We draw your attention to this Engineers Australia Symposium in Adelaide on 1 & 2 July that will explore aspects of safety in engineering and design across a range of industries, including a presentation from CROSS-AUS.

CROSS-US

In association with Structural-Safety UK, Glenn Bell, Senior Principal of Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, President-elect of SEI (Structural Engineering Institute; part of ASCE), and IStructE Board member, has laid down the framework for CROSS-US with SEI as the principal sponsor.

Also involved is NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) with the prospect of other Federal Agencies to follow. CROSS-US will be launched shortly and can be accessed through www.structural-safety.org.

CROSS-US was introduced during a special session at the SEI Structures Congress 2019 in Orlando on the Grenfell Tower Fire - The Consequences for Safety.

Call for CROSS-AUS Reports

We have now received several reports via our website, some of which relate to issues raised in the above reports, and these are now with our Panel members for comment and will be published in due course.

Currently matters under consideration include quality of design documentation, competency of participants, communication and change management, design of RC walls, temporary works, deep excavations and light gauge steel trusses. If you have any concerns about these, or any other issues, or you have experienced an event that should be shared so that we can all learn from it, we encourage you to submit a report via the CROSS-AUS website.

Feedback on published reports is also very important and we thank Professor Hancock, Chair of Standards Australia Committee BD/1, for his contribution related to steel fabrication issues and the proposed revisions to AS 4100 and AS/NZS 5131.

We look forward to your contribution and feedback.

SUBMIT CROSS-AUS REPORT

Mike Fordyce
CROSS-AUS Director

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