International Federation of Consulting Engineers

The Global Voice of Consulting Engineers

Site Safety

FIDIC Briefing Note

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Contents

Background 2
Site Safety 3
Rationale 3
FIDIC recommends: 3

Background

The international engineering federation FIDIC (the International Federation of Consulting Engineers) believes that its member associations and their members should strive to achieve the highest degree of quality and standards.

FIDIC has always had policy statements that it expects its members to follow to ensure high standards of service in the infrastructure industry. These standards are reflected in FIDICs contracts, policy work, events and committees.

Site Safety

Accidents at workplaces, and the trauma which results from them, have become a major concern. The concern arises from the personal difficulties which accident victims face, the amount of resources needed to assist accident victims to deal with personal difficulties (sometimes for the remainder of a lifetime), and the loss of output which inevitably flows from accidents. The concern is real and must be addressed.

Whilst it is necessary to deal with this problem, recent attempts in some countries have been, unfortunately, mainly politically driven attempting to coerce improvement. The circumstances surrounding accidents have been put into a criminal context, so that employers and their employees can be found guilty of the crime of not providing a safe workplace. This responsibility can draw engineers, including consulting engineers, into great difficulties.

There are two critical matters which should be central to a system for creating and maintaining site safety.

- First, the system must recognise that there is no process that can be termed “safe”, in an absolute sense. All that can be aimed for is a process that is as safe as the resources devoted to it will allow.
- Second, individuals can only be held accountable for circumstances they can control. In the complex environment in which engineers work, where many parties are drawn into co-operative efforts to achieve a desired outcome, matching responsibility with the control needed for its acceptance has proved extremely difficult. Just as there is no such thing as a clear boundary between “safe” and “unsafe”, there probably can be no clear matching of control and responsibility.

Given these difficulties, systems designed to achieve optimum site safety are more likely to succeed if they set out to induce change for the better rather than to coerce such change. Legislators looking for moe immediate improvements in safety and the burden of trauma management, has led to an emphasis on coercion.

This trend will not serve all the parties involved well. If private initiatives are timely, the objective of safety can be realised with more flexibility than under coercion.

Rationale

The vast resources devoted to the management of accident-induced events could be directed into better practice, developed in a non-adversarial environment, to the benefit of communities served by engineers.

FIDIC recommends:

- Member associations establish logical systems and promote methods for the establishment and maintenance of appropriately safe working practices at workplaces.
- Consultancy firms should ensure they maintain and undertake only safe practices when working on sites

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