

Safe partnerships

MIRIAM BELL talks to Stephen Hunt of Manukau City Council, winner of the leadership of an industry sector or region category.

The slogan on *Manukau City Council's* website proclaims the city is 'young, vibrant and colourful'.

The words conjure up an image of progressiveness. And, in the area of workplace health and safety, that is indeed the case – with the council forging a path for other local authorities to follow.

As proof of its groundbreaking ways, it won the best leadership of an industry sector category at this year's NZ Workplace Health & Safety Awards.

In late 2005 the council began a significant initiative to change the behaviour and culture of all the council contractors, consultants and staff, to achieve safe work practices.

Stephen Hunt, the council's group manager best practice in the organisational performance directorate, says the winning initiative revolves around the promotion of health and safety at physical works contract sites across the city and working in partnership with the various stakeholders.

Better contract management

In late 2005 the council began a project to develop and implement processes which would allow better contract management in this area. This was the beginning of a significant initiative to change the behaviour and culture of all the council's contractors, consultants and staff, to achieve safe work practices, says Hunt.

"The project was prompted by a desire to improve our performance in the OHS area, and to make sure that we give it the attention it deserves. Given the negatives involved with getting it wrong are so high, we knew we could do it better and we wanted to do so."

After dividing the project into four stages, the council liaised with *HR2GO's Craig Macdonald*, *ACC* and the *De-*



Peter Moloney, team leader building compliance with Manukau Building Consultants, doing a site inspection.

Courtesy Manukau City Council

partment of Labour to establish 20 best practice guidelines for minimum safety standards and develop processes to successfully manage health and safety requirements in physical works contracts. It also initiated an education programme, which included training workshops and breakfasts, to help contractors, consultants and staff achieve the desired standards.

Health and safety partners

Companies were then invited to apply to join the scheme and to achieve certification as a 'partner in health and safety with Manukau City Council'. Those who achieve certification receive a unique number, identifying their organisation as a company that the council knows can meet its minimum OHS requirements. Hunt explains that this means elements of the company's safety practices, like traffic management, have been pre-approved for works contracts with the council. It also reduces the amount of paper work they have to do as part of the tender submission process.

"Once a company meets the necessary requirements, they just need to do a site-specific plan for each job," he says. "Ultimately, there are considerable savings – in both time and money – for them and for us too."

"Often a company's savings could amount to tens of thousands of dollars for a big job, so certification can make a real difference to a company."

Numbers growing

The council has now recognised 35 companies as 'certified partners' and others are currently going through the application process. A list of recently certified companies is available for public view on the council's website.

The project has also seen the development of a centralised contractor database; the commencement of a system of quarterly and monthly health and safety reporting; the development of relevant templates to manage safety on public works contracts; revision of the council's website to include OHS information; the provision



of regular updates to key stakeholders; and the development of a closer relationship with the Department of Labour and ACC.

Initial resistance

Hunt says the scheme was progressed through sponsorship and project management, and that its impetus was assisted by the commitment of senior council management. He admits, however, that it took some time to build up general enthusiasm for the project.

“As with most change, there was an initial resistance to it, so

it did require tenacity to keep banging away to get people into it. Our limited resources and the sheer size of the project were difficult too.”

He says it takes a while to build up a workplace health and safety culture – and that was the council’s long-term aim.

“However, now the partnership scheme and all the associated processes are up and running, people have bought into the concept of workplace health and safety. They understand that we are promising a no-blame culture, and it’s all working really well.”

Many benefits

Some of the noticeable benefits of the project have been:

- A reduction in time, resources and money for every contractor tendering for a contract, and for the council in evaluating the tenders;
- A significant reduction in lost time injuries and OHS notices;
- Increased transparency in the reporting process; and
- An increased knowledge and awareness of health and safety issues among stakeholders.

Also, a health and safety manager has recently been appointed. This

newly-created role will provide the council with the ability to be more holistic about the safety, health and wellbeing of its staff, along with the safety of contractors and the public, says Hunt.

All these achievements, as well as the *Safeguard* award and the official certification of their partners, have been recognised by the council – from mayor Sir *Barry Curtis* down. Hunt says the council always tries to encourage and recognise successes, but the essential message it has taken from this process has been that, with good health and safety measures, you can never lose. ■

Question: How many customers slipping over is too many?

Answer: One

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