

health & safety

HEALTH & SAFETY – A CO-ORDINATED CONCEPT

Professionals working within the built environment are forever being presented with new legislation, new materials and new technologies for construction. The theme of health and safety is global – and success stems from the initial design concepts throughout the construction process to the ongoing maintenance and refurbishment of the finished building. Professionals are not only bombarded with home legislation but also that developed within a European context and, often, international and global interaction. The Association, through its positive relationships developed within the AEEBC (Association d'Experts Européens du Bâtiment et de la Construction) and WOBO (The World Organization of Building Officials), is able to participate in a range of activities and disseminate information to its membership and also provide links where further information can be obtained.

A recent opportunity allowed the Association to exhibit and participate in the First European Conference on Health & Safety Co-ordination in the Construction Industry at the Barcelona World Trade Centre in February. The direct linkage is with The General Council of Technical Architects of Spain who recently have changed their designatory title to 'technical architects and building engineers'. The Exhibition marked the anniversary of the issue of Directive 1992/57/CEE related to minimum health and safety measures on temporary or mobile sites and the new professional functions relating to the health and safety co-ordinator. The event was supported by a range of speakers from within Europe and guest participation from South Africa. The presentations related to the training of co-ordinators and their gaining of new competencies with emphasis on both the design and construction phases, coupled



with the debate as to whether health and safety was part of the general academic development of professionals or whether specific health and safety academic training should be provided. Within this context the need for a full understanding of the technical processes involved in the creation of the built environment and the role of the Health and Safety Plan as a tool to prevent accidents, loss of life and construction delays was debated. It is interesting, even at this stage, to note the wide variety of views and the different approaches to application and enforcement. We only have to refer to the Health & Safety Executive's newsletters to realise that, even within the UK, whilst we have a measure of success, we still experience accidents and death. Discussions with Stephen Williams, Chief Inspector of the Construction Division of the Health & Safety Executive, following on from the event reinforced the Executive's view on the need to enforce health and safety legislation and the responsibility of all professionals to carry out their duties to support compliance, identify dangers and remove them from the construction process. The Exhibition provided opportunities to explore working relationships within Europe and it was pleasing to discuss developments within the European context with Maria-Teresa Moitinho de Almeida, Principal Administrator European Commission, Luxembourg. The discussion focused not only on health and safety but also the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the application of the requirements for energy performance certification and progress within Europe. It was recognised that EU member states are at different levels of achievement in all areas of legislative change and that prospective EU member states will require additional support at all levels to aid smooth transition in

both legislative and technical matters. Discussions with Professor John Smallwood from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa, reinforced the need for the recognition and transfer of academic knowledge incorporating research and development within the global setting and the existence of development opportunities for the Association and its membership. They say that 'the world is getting smaller' and it was unbelievable that one of the presenters, Barney Green of Combisafe International Limited, is actually based in Northampton. Discussions are taking place as to how we can co-ordinate developments and possible technical visits with his organisation.

The Association exhibited along with representatives offering safe systems of work, new techniques, protection, site and staff supervision – reiterating the need for effective training and the auditing of personnel on and about the construction site. It was interesting to explore processes and procedures but also recognise the high levels of commonality that already exist within Europe.

Information is available from a range of websites and the following may be of interest:

- www.combisafe.co.uk
- www.certum.es
- www.traza.com
- www.arquitectura-tecnica.org

The event provided for the reinforcement of professional skills and the expansion of the relationships between the Association and technical architects and discussions took place with José Antonio Otero Cerezo, Francisco García Figueroa, Ramon Puig and Carlos Aymat Escalada. These included issues relating to the activities carried out by technical architects which are not dissimilar to those provided by our members and the exploration and reasoning behind their name change to incorporate the term 'building engineer'. The requirements within Spain are geared to degree level qualifications and current debate relates to the duration of the academic programme. As part of the ongoing review the framework for the recognition of professionals within Europe is under discussion and the Association will be looking to establish reciprocal arrangements to support the mobility of professionals within a European context. The Association, in the provision of opportunities for its members and the transfer of information, will continue its activity within a European and Global context and provide supportive information as it becomes available.

David Gibson
Chief Executive

