



ONE SITE, 57 ISSUES

The Channel 7 current affairs program Today Tonight broadcast in June 2007 video footage supplied by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union of alleged safety and health transgressions at the Q-Con construction site on St Georges Terrace in Perth; footage not seen previously – or since – by the authorities. In this exclusive, **Jaci Moore** reports on the review of the video by a panel of safety professionals.



A photo supplied by the CFMEU showing a worker operating at height on a surface without edge protection.

The Q-Con site had been under scrutiny by the CFMEU for some time. The union's concerns have been reported extensively in the mainstream media, and an incident involving a concrete pour on July 5 brought the site into further conflict.

ASMM approached the Safety Institute of Australia (Western Australia) and the union, and they agreed to have a panel of safety professionals – independent from both the CFMEU and WorkSafe WA – review the video footage of the site and suggest a professional opinion of the safety issues, without political bias.

The panel consisted of SIA (WA) president Gavin Waugh, who is a fellow of the institute, Geoff Taylor, a consultant and chartered fellow of the institute, Doug Rogers of Calibre Safety, another fellow of the institute, and Luciano Muriale, a consultant with OH&S Pty Ltd and former WorkSafe inspector.

The panel accordingly viewed the video and recognised some 57 health and safety issues including poor housekeeping standards.

Concerns ranged from the state of the workers' ablution facilities (that probably would not meet the code of practice for

employees) to debris that could pose a risk to the public as a result of poor edge protection in areas of the building. The panel particularly stressed the apparent lack of signage or indication of the existence of an emergency management plan.

There were numerous potential slip, trip and fall hazards seen in the video. Furthermore, the panellists noted oxygen cylinders that were not secured, a fire extinguisher that seemed unserviceable due to a damaged hose and low pressure, electrical leads suspended from ducts and mesh fencing indicative of possible breaches of the Australian Standard AS3012.

In addition, there were heavy items stored on top of containers with unsecured ladders leaning against the containers, a man cage was seen placed on top of the crane counterweights, which were themselves poorly stacked, and the placement of a stack of column shutters on top of crates of tiles represented a potential risk of collapse.

Evidence was also seen of reinforcement bars with no caps, ramps that did not cover the full length of cavities, handrails that were possibly not built to regulation specifications ... and the list goes on.

"There are a number of serious safety issues in the footage," Doug Rogers said. "We see no evidence of emergency planning and preparation, fire equipment not fit for service and no warnings for areas that should seemingly be eye hazard areas."

"There is evidence of a range of employer and employee breaches of safety legislations and there is certainly evidence of the absolute minimum standards being used. There is no evidence of any best practice."

"Our Act came out in 1984; this site does not reflect the improvements that this legislation should ensure. On the face of what we have seen there is definite room for improvement on this site."

The July 5 incident occurred when a concrete panel cracked during a concrete pour on the 16th floor. About one cubic metre of slurry poured into the crane gantry parallel to it. A piece of broken concrete panel was taken by WorkSafe for further investigation.

According to WorkSafe, a prohibition notice was issued to stop further pouring in that specific area until an engineer had declared other panels to be safe.

The CFMEU claims the lift next to the crane gantry was covered in slurry, and it was fortunate the operator was not there at the time.

WorkSafe has received a number of complaints regarding safety issues from people working at the site. These ranged from complaints about workers wearing damaged boots to working in severe wind conditions.

By July, WorkSafe inspectors had issued two verbal warnings regarding reo bars requiring protection caps and replacing the incorrect caps on some reo bars. A verbal warning was also issued for an electrical lead that was dangling off scaffolding. According to WorkSafe, these issues were resolved while the inspector was still onsite.

The SIA WA has taken the process further, and is now in ongoing discussions with WorkSafe to develop improvement to construction site safety in WA.

Waugh said the number of injuries and fatalities in the construction industry remained unacceptably high, with little progress towards permanent improvement.

ASMM