

Editor's comment

UKCG DISARRAY SPARKS ALARM

THERE is alarm, confusion and concern among flooring and other specialist contractors over a new 'policy' from the UK Contractors Group requiring all supply chain supervisors to be fully qualified. This 'policy' is said to apply to everyone in charge of a 'gang' of trades people, which could mean just one.

This month (January 1, 2010) was when it was due to become effective, but as we went to press UKCG hadn't decided whether to postpone it, despite widespread calls for clarification of several ambiguous areas of the 'policy'.

The principle of having qualified supervisors for the different trades is evidently very sensible, given that many site accidents have been shown to be due to the lack of skilled supervision.

But whether an experienced floorlayer, accompanied by one apprentice, has to be a qualified supervisor still isn't clear. This is a vital question for flooring contractors, many of whom are facing terrible cashflow problems, wondering where they'll find the money to pay for this extra training.

Unfortunately, some key aspects of this new 'policy' are left open to interpretation, and many are asking how you can call it a 'policy' if it's implemented differently by each of the two dozen UKCG members. And as every flooring contractor knows, some site managers are bloody-minded and dictatorial, while others are more accommodating and prepared to consider each case on its merits.

Unreasonable demands by certain main contractors regularly make flooring contractors' lives a misery. For example, it's widely resented that floorlayers on certain

sites are forced to wear full protective clothing, including hard hats, industrial goggles, reinforced gloves and steel capped boots even when only fitting carpets.

It's an affront that major contractor organisations have historically been unable to get members to act in unison. Many recall the ill-fated December 31, 2003, deadline set by the Major Contractors Group, the predecessor of the UKCG, after which anyone without a CSCS (construction skills) card would be banned from working on their sites.

Then Surprise! Surprise! The year 2004 dawned and the MCG deadline was quietly forgotten. A survey at the time revealed that only 57% of people in construction trades had CSCS cards. If strictly enforced, that directive would have caused massive disruption, leaving many major construction projects grinding to a halt.

UKCG needs to hold proper consultations and give clear leadership about its 'policies'. So far, neither has been apparent. Otherwise it risks becoming ineffectual as its powerful members do their own thing. This will make the concept of partnerships in construction meaningless. (See Richard Catt's comment page 20)



ALAN BAKALOR, Editor

Email: alancfj@btconnect.com



For starters: Driven to distraction

As reported in **CFJ**, business drivers are being prosecuted for dangerous driving. Now a new RAC survey reveals that 39% of UK motorists admit to being seriously distracted behind the wheel.

Remarkably, 20% say they drive while listening to music through headphones, and 16% admit putting on make-up while on the move. Alarming 26%

(mainly drivers under 24) confess to texting while driving. In-car gadgets most distracting are CD and radio controls (57%); sat-nav (41%); mobile phones (32%); air-con (31%) and dashboard lights (21%).

However, the survey didn't question about being distracted by a passenger conducting an argument or doing something which causes you to lose focus.



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