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Directors watch workplace safety

June 18, 2005

While safety on building sites has always been a priority for construction groups, new requirements for more accountability among directors are shifting that awareness to the boardroom.

But having a builder wear a harness is only the tip of a range of potential problems that include hazardous waste disposal, slippery floors at shopping centres and pedestrians tripping over pipes on construction sites.

Companies are turning for help to groups such as DuPont Safety Resources, a world authority on safe workplaces. DSR was formed to leverage the 200-year history of health and hazard safety programs at the huge global paint and chemical company, DuPont. It helps leading-edge companies improve product quality, security, productivity, public image and employee morale, and reduce insurance and operating costs.

Laurence O'Dwyer, DuPont's vice-president Asia Pacific for safety resources, said investors with a keener interest in ethical issues were putting pressures on directors to ensure safety issues - from eliminating fatalities on building sites to chemical spills - were kept under control.

"It is difficult to separate work operations from safety operations. If safety is lacking it can affect a company's bottom line through loss of profits and rising costs from production delays," Mr O'Dwyer said.

"There are many issues of safety that we advise on, from health care, where workers have to lift people, to chemical hazards and training of directors that the issue is as relevant as the underlying business."

Mr O'Dwyer said companies were now calling in his group at the start of projects to work closely with architects to incorporate safety issues from day one.

He said that DuPont had been called in to advise directors on how to handle the issue of safety when work was required in tough weather conditions.

Since 1970, DuPont had helped hundreds of organisations around the world to reduce workplace injuries and fatalities. The company works one-on-one with companies such as Qantas, BHP and Bunnings.

Roger Moore, Asia-Pacific president of DuPont Safety Resources, said safety was a core business value at DuPont and "we take it very seriously".

Carolyn Cummins

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