

MORE FROM LESS

News from the UK precast concrete sustainability project

ISSUE 4

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Introduction

This newsletter has been produced in support of the four-year Engineering Doctorate project being undertaken with Loughborough University dedicated to developing a sector sustainability strategy for the UK precast concrete and masonry industry. The project and this newsletter are sponsored by the British Precast Concrete Federation over the four years to September 2008.

The purpose of the newsletter is to inform both the precast industry and other stakeholders of developments resulting from the project, ways in which contributions can be made and where further information can be obtained. I look forward to working with as many of you as possible during this project – please feel free to pass *More from Less* to colleagues. Your contributions to future issues are very welcome.

Ian Holton – Editor

Sustainability and the Concrete Producer

The second one-day conference on this theme, jointly organised by British Precast and BRMCA, will be held at the Holywell Court Conference Centre in Loughborough on Thursday 8 June. This conference will draw together much of the current work on sustainability that will, to a major extent, govern the future health and prosperity of the concrete industry. It will be an essential event for all those involved in the production and distribution of concrete and concrete products, as well as their suppliers and customers.

Highlights of the conference include:

- A keynote presentation on concrete and the environment by Dr Claus Nielsen of Denmark's Concrete Centre
- Leading practitioners from the ready-mixed and precast concrete industries talking about some of their companies' experiences in the drive to be more sustainable
- SAFED Aggregates – the DEFRA and DfT supported programme that is helping LGV drivers to further develop their safe and fuel-efficient driving techniques

The first conference in this series in December 2005 was well attended and there is already considerable interest in the second; see the British Precast events website for further details (<http://www.britishprecast.org/events/events.php>).

Sustainability Awards

The aim of the award scheme is to reward excellence within the British Precast membership and to publicise the progress of the industry towards sustainability. Entries are invited from all members on either a single site or company-wide basis, and will be judged against their sustainability benefits, innovatory approach, wider applicability and employee participation. Closing date for entries is 26 May and the awards, sponsored by The Concrete Centre, will be presented at the British Precast Best Practice Awards Dinner on 21 September. Contact Colin Nessfield (cdn@britishprecast.org) for further details.

Details of all last year's entries and award winners can be found in the Best Practice Awards 2005 brochure 'Moving the Industry Forward', available from info@britishprecast.org or as a download at www.britishprecast.org.

Sustainable Construction Strategy Review

British Precast has made a formal response to Government on behalf of the precast industry in respect of its review of the Sustainable Construction Strategy; the Strategy was first published in 2000 and is being updated in view of the major developments in Government policy and industry practices that have occurred since then. A key element in the review is the setting of new targets and visions for sustainable construction to 2015 and beyond, covering climate change and energy, waste, materials, costs, water, quality, skills, safety and respect for people. More detail on these can be found at: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/construction/sustain/sustainsummary.pdf>.

The need for the Strategy to form part of a 'joined-up' approach to sustainability by the Government was stressed in our response, together with the need to move away from focusing purely on the environmental aspect of sustainability and the embodied energy impacts of construction, to focus instead on whole life performance. We also proposed that policies be developed that encourage voluntary action and initiatives by sectors to meet the sustainability challenge, rather than legislation.

Specific responses were made on each of the targets and visions, particularly where these were likely to be detrimental to the concrete industry in particular or the construction industry in general, or were consumer based and therefore beyond our control. In general terms we considered that measures need to be in place that will allow UK plc to remain competitive and take the lead in delivering a sustainable built environment, including ensuring that Government legislation does not impose unnecessary barriers that make the UK construction industry uncompetitive in the global market.

Responses have also been made by the Construction Products Association, The Concrete Centre and the British Cement Association. Publication of the revised strategy document is currently expected in the summer.

British Precast Sustainability Committee

A reminder that participation in the Sustainability Committee is open to representatives of all member companies and that one of the functions of the Committee is to provide a forum in which members can share experience of such issues as environmental management certification, corporate social responsibility and community relations. The next Committee meeting will be held at the British Precast offices in Leicester on Wednesday 7 June. Contact Colin Nessfield (cdn@britishprecast.org) for further details.

British Precast Health and Safety Committee

David Gilbert has been appointed Chairman of the Health & Safety Committee, David is Head of Health & Safety at Hanson Building Products. Joining him on the committee is David Appleton of the HSE, continuing the role of Clive Brookes in embedding HSE thinking, experience and policy into the precast concrete sector.

Concrete Targets 2010

This years 'Concrete Targets 2010' award scheme for accident reduction focuses on Noise and Vibration. Closing date for entries is 31 May. Full details of the scheme are available to all members, see <http://www.britishprecast.org/concretetargets/index.php> or contact Colin Nessfield for further details.

Sustainability Project News

News from the UK precast concrete sector sustainability strategy project is also available on the Sustainable Precast website www.sustainableprecast.com

Industry Survey

Thanks to all those that responded to the questionnaire survey to establish the sector's current position on a range of business and sustainability related issues. Responses were received from 29 member companies operating over 150 precast factories, with an annual turnover in excess of £1.5 billion achieved from approximately 15 million tonnes of production. This is conservatively estimated to be over 65% of the precast industry.

The majority of respondents agreed that sustainability was not just a passing fashion that meant more legislation and taxes, and recognise that it is about being responsive and responsible in all aspects of their business, in order to ensure a future for those businesses.

The majority of companies had policies in place or under development covering key issues with respect to environmental protection, resource use and social progress, such as:

- Provision of a safe and healthy working environment (100%)
- Dust prevention and control (100%)
- Noise monitoring and control (95%)
- Staff training and development (95%)
- Promoting energy efficiency (80%)
- Recycling and reusing waste products (80%)
- Reducing cement consumption (80%)
- Recycling water (70%)

Over 80% of member companies had quality management systems accredited to ISO 9000 or an equivalent standard, with a further 10% of companies developing systems. Over 35% of companies have environmental management systems accredited to ISO 14000 or an equivalent standard, with a further 30% developing systems. The figures are similar for health and safety systems to OHSHS 18000.

Health and safety was rated the top business issue for companies, followed by a range of economic issues including:

- Profitability and competitiveness
- Competition from other products and materials
- Cash flow and payment practices
- Maintaining good return on assets

To ensure the future of the industry, the priority actions were identified to be:

- Adequate education of specifiers and users of precast products
- Adding value to products
- Innovation
- Promotion of the sustainability benefits of precast products
- Investment in new technologies
- Provision of a safe and healthy working environment

The information will be used to determine future objectives for the sector, which British Precast will be conveying to stakeholders and seeking your commitment to support. A short report summarising the survey findings is available from Ian Holton (ih@britishprecast.org).

Industry Headlines

Sustainability related news headlines from the cement and concrete sector, and beyond.

BRE Green Guide

Work on revising the Green Guide is progressing with BRE currently carrying out a new weightings exercise to determine which environmental factors (and their priority) building materials should be assessed against. Andrew Frost of The Concrete Centre has been closely involved with the revision and will be giving a comprehensive report on progress at the 'Sustainability and the Concrete Producer' seminar on 8 June.

Code for Sustainable Homes

Formal responses to the Government's draft Code for Sustainable Homes, formerly the Code for Sustainable Buildings, were made by The Concrete Centre, Modern Masonry Alliance and Construction Products Association in March. Ministers and the Senior Steering Group responsible for developing the Code have now met to consider these and other responses. Further developments are expected before the Code is launched towards the end of the year.

Jane Thornback of the Construction Products Association will be talking about the implications of the Code for product producers at the 'Sustainability and the Concrete Producer' seminar on 8 June.

Standard for managing sustainable development

BSI has just launched BS 8900:2006 Guidance for managing sustainable development. This new standard is claimed to guide organisations towards effective management of their impact on society and the environment. See <http://www.bsi-global.com/BS8900> for further details.

Skills and sustainability

Recent workshops held with construction clients and contractors by the CITB and ConstructionSkills, found that skills are a notable constraint on the capacity of the construction industry to act in a sustainable manner. Actions to improve this have been identified and will be taken forward by ConstructionSkills, the Sector Skills Council for Construction (<http://www.constructionskills.net>).

Concrete Congress

The Concrete Technology Unit at the University of Dundee are holding their 7th International Congress "Concrete: Construction's Sustainable Option" in September 2007. Conference themes include:

- Role for concrete in global development
- Precast concrete: towards lean construction
- Concrete durability: achievement and enhancement
- Designing concrete for the visual environment
- Concrete for Fire Engineering
- Harnessing fibres for concrete construction

See <http://www.ctucongress.co.uk> for further details.

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