

CIF Health and Safety Summit



Natalie Ryan, business development, CIF Pension Administration Services (CPAS); Pat Lucey, president, Construction Industry Federation and managing director - Civils UK & Ireland, John Sisk & Son (Holdings) Ltd; and Paula Thornton, business development manager, CIF Pension Administration Services (CPAS)



John Egan, executive, safety and training, Construction Industry Federation; Robert Butler, head of learning and development, Construction Industry Federation and Conor Greham, business development at Construction Industry Federation (CIF)

Pictures: Maura Hickey

Building up wellbeing in the construction sector

While health and safety has long been a crucial area for the construction industry, a new focus on mental and emotional wellbeing of workers is gaining traction, writes **Quinton O'Reilly**

At one point during his keynote, Brian Kraus, the global service lead for safety services in Environmental Resources Management (ERM), mentioned a question which highlighted how effective change comes about. Referencing a recent survey, one of the questions it asked participants was what they thought was the most effective way to drive safety improvements on the front line. Kraus said it was an open-ended question, but once the answers were brought together and analysed, the same theme popped up: leadership. That is, leadership engagement on the front line was the most powerful way to drive improvement in performance. For the audience attending the CIF Health and Safety Summit in Croke Park earlier this week, this may have been an obvious thing to say, yet it highlighted that even the obvious actions can have multiple, significant impacts. "Safety is a source of increasing risk and opportunity for businesses," said Kraus. "Opportunities because safety is becoming a bigger concern for society so those organisations which have superior safety are able to meet their stakeholders' expectations. "So if there's a silver bullet, it's leadership and engaging on the front line."

Steve Morris, application engineer at 3M personal safety division, talked about fall protection and said that it's all about components coming together like equipment quality, regulations and, most importantly, good-quality training. "Fall protection isn't about wearing a harness, otherwise we'd all be wearing a harness. It's a system," he said. "What's the biggest cause of accidents usually? It's the human intervention." Another small but important element designed towards safety and convenience was the Gas Networks Ireland (GNI)'s recent launch of Dial before you Dig, a digital mapping system for gas networks that construction organisations can reference in the planning phases. Allowing them to check real-time information is small but a significant tool to have since last year alone, it recorded 550 incidents to its network, incidents that can have major repercussions to first parties and third parties alike. "Damage to the gas network can cause serious injury, major disruption and worse," said Paul O'Brien, design services manager for GNI. "This year, strikes on the network are trending up 20 per cent, driven by the strong growth in the construction sector. "Safety is our number one priority and this project aligns quite nicely with our values." Some of this was referred to by his colleague Owen Wilson, networks safety manager of GNI, earlier in a panel discussion. Talking about the underground services group, which provides anyone undertaking design and excavation works to get information about the location of cables, pipes and other utility assets, Wilson said that there's a responsibility from utility holders to think about how best to service users. "There is a responsibility on



From left: Will McLellan, senior sales executive, 3M; Mark Fagan, business director Ireland and Northern Ireland, Topcon; Paul O'Brien, design services manager, Gas Networks Ireland (GNI); Sarah Murphy, managing director, Business Post Events and iQuest; Owen Wilson, networks safety manager, Gas Networks Ireland and Brian Molloy, inspector, HSA



Brian Kraus, global service lead for safety services, ERM (Environmental Resources Management)



Paul O'Shea, managing director, Ashview Consultants and chairperson, Irish Branch of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM); Mark Madigan, senior safety and health manager, ESB Networks; Owen Wilson, networks safety manager, Gas Networks Ireland; Donie Pardy, head of environment, health and safety, eir and Neil Lenehan, health, safety, quality and environmental manager, Irish Water

us to think about what we're doing," he said. "How can we improve not only our own performance in terms of our supply chain and staff digging but as owners of those utilities, help the wider industry to be safer with our pipes and cables."

Focusing on mental health
While the obvious topic focused on was on the physical safety of those in the construction industry, a significant amount of time was dedicated to the mental and emotional wellbeing of workers. Construction isn't exempt from issues of mental health and this was perhaps best highlighted by Tom Parsons,

Micheál O'Connor, vice-president (VP) and general manager, Jacobs Ireland; Paul O'Shea, managing director, Ashview Consultants and chairperson, Irish Branch of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM); Frances McArdle, operations director, Height for Hire; Brian Byrne, joint managing director, Cleary & Doyle Construction Ltd and Tom Parsons, BeyondZero Culture Manager Europe, Jacobs Engineering and inter-county GAA player with Mayo

people to live healthy lives, and have a buffer for when things get tough. Part of why BeyondZero came into existence was due to an oil refinery accident that happened in 2005 where the loss of 11 lives created a massive ripple effect across the entire business. While safety was its primary goal, its purpose evolved beyond that to create a culture of care. "Culture of care for me is to allow and care about our people's health, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing," he said. "We thrive on wellbeing strategy which looks at how we can bring in family and relationships into our organisations and be inclusive to find your values." The theme continued into the afternoon with the panel discussion looking at the future of H&S professionals. Making sure that all employees feel part of a community and don't feel isolated, especially if they're not working on site, but on the field and abroad, is crucial. "The main issues we have

is getting the right people to get that message out there," said Cathy Kane, EHS sector lead for Mercury Engineering. "A lot of our employees would work abroad and we've got a lot of people in the likes of Germany and England coming over here so it's important that they feel a part of the community and don't feel isolated. "Not just those on the field, but the engineers, project managers that are going to have stressful situations." For all of it, the main focus is to make sure all employees are safe and well. Work in the industry can be challenging and the right people are those who have the soft skills and understanding to get the message across. "We are human at the end of the day and the main traits a safety officer needs to have are empathy and understanding," she said. "It is important that we look after our colleagues so they can do their job and make sure they're going home at the end of the day."

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