



Pictured L-R: Wendy Beatty, Chair BuildHealth, Robert Kidd, Chief Executive, Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and William Lemon, IOSH Chair for Northern Ireland.

BUILDHEALTH CHAIR, WENDY BEATTY ON HOW SHARING THE SAME MESSAGE CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT ON THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE INDUSTRY'S WORKFORCE...

Sharing is caring for the health and safety of workers within the construction industry

Wendy Beatty's professional construction career spans more than 20 years, much of it spent within the health and safety field. During her career it became clear to her there needs to be better provision and sharing of information around Health issues and best practice to the wider construction industry including smaller subcontracted companies.

As she comes to the end of her two-year tenure as Chair of BuildHealth, she reflects on how far the industry has come in terms of improving health and safety standards for its workforce, and where it still needs to go...

NIB: First of all, what is BuildHealth? Who are its members and what are its main aims?

WB: BuildHealth members are construction companies from across Northern Ireland, large and small, who are committed to improving the health of workers within the industry.

NIB: What is the construction industry in Northern Ireland doing right in terms of improving the health and safety of its workforce?

WB: During my time within the construction industry there have been many changes in relation to health and safety. Machinery has improved

with additional safety features such as all-round visibility and use of visual aids. Improvements in design of plant and machinery has seen reduced levels of workplace exposure to noise and vibration. I have also seen a considerable shift in relation to staff welfare by the provision of better facilities on site. The construction industry has also been leaders in development of policies and procedures around support of workers from a mental health and wellbeing perspective.

The industry is sharing information to staff, providing training and guidance to its staff on how to work healthy not just safely and involving staff in the decision-making



processes so they understand the long-term risks associated with exposure to noise, dust, chemicals, occupational cancers, stress, manual handling etc. We are working towards ensuring a good work/life balance is achieved by assessing the impacts of working hours, ensuring staff welfare is a priority when working away from home and by providing health screening for staff and developing employment assistance programmes.

NIB: Where is the industry falling short and what can it do better?

WB: We are falling short by not recognising the long term effects of occupational health issues. We do not give health the same risk profile as we do safety even though if we look at the statistics on occupational health issues we should. Control measures are easily achievable and we must ensure staff coming into the industry are protected against long term health issues.

NIB: How does BuildHealth aim to help the industry improve the health and safety of its workforce?

WB: BuildHealth provides website resources, opportunities for best practice sharing, training events and annual conference to share information among members. BuildHealth also runs a mentoring scheme for new members, establishes 'champion sites' and encourages interaction between construction companies. Our "Let's Talk Health" week this October was aimed at re-enforcing the message on health issues to the workforce.

NIB: What message do you have to

any construction industry companies who are not already signed up to the BuildHealth initiative?

WB: I strongly believe that if we are all sharing the same message we can make a bigger contribution and impact on the health of all those who work within the industry. We can ensure that smaller companies, who may not have access to the information and resources, are able to benefit from the knowledge and mentoring of like-minded companies and individuals. Collaboration with HSENI, CITB and WHLG ensures that all members are kept up-to-date with current issues and new developments around the health and safety field. As a group we can also influence what issues need to be addressed.

For more information about the benefits of becoming a BuildHealth member, visit: www.buildhealthni.com

Lets Talk Health

In conjunction with IOSH BuildHealth have put together a series of 10 discussion topics in relation to health for use as discussion points on sites during the 'Lets Talk Health' week. Each topic has a Q&A section designed to raise awareness and encourage sites to get back to talking about health issues and help prevent health issues for staff further down the line. In support of the initiative, Robert Kidd, Chief Executive, Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland commented, "HSENI supports the 'Let's Talk Health' week and encourages companies to get involved in having these practical health discussions on site. Together we can all make a real difference to health outcomes for construction workers. Health risks can be assessed and mitigated with appropriate measures and controls."



Robert Kidd, Chief Executive, Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland.