SUSTAINABLE BUILDING NEW CHALLENGE FOR QUANTITY SURVEYORS

The increasing emphasis on sustainable construction has placed new and unprecedented responsibilities on the shoulders of the quantity surveying profession, Dr Deen Letchmiah, Board member of the Association of South African Association of Quantity Surveyors (ASAQS), has stated.

Speaking at the recent ASAQS seminar, 'Building on Sunshine', held in Johannesburg, Dr Letchmiah, who is CEO of the LDM Group and represents ASAQS on the Green Building Council of SA (GBCSA), said the days of quantity surveyors' role in the building environment concentrating mainly on cost control, were over. "Modern quantity surveyors need to consider the driving forces of the green environment in which they operate. They need to be holistic in thought and execution to drive sustainability directives and realise that all components of instructural development and operations must be reviewed to provide sustainable solutions," he told the more than 200 delegates from all over the country who attended the first ASAQS annual seminar.

Dr Letchmiah said sustainable construction presented new challenges - as well as important new opportunities - to quantity surveyors. "New services can now be offered to clients, such as analysing and advising on Green Capital Costs, promoting the benefits of Life Cycle management, Green Financing and Green Leases, and cost effective sustainable strategies. Property Performance Appraisals, Value Management and Engineering solutions, as well as the use of information technology such as Building Management Systems and Information Models, will now all form part of the services a QS can offer clients."

He said Life Cycle Costing and Facilities Management, in particular, were two services quantity surveyors could offer - and specialise in - to achieve sustainable building.

"Life Cycle Costing, basically, can be defined as the sum of all recurring and non-recurring costs over the full lifespan or a specified period of applicable structures, goods or services. This includes the purchase price, installation and operational costs, maintenance and upgrading costs, and the remaining value at the end of ownership of the commodity in question - in other words: the total cost of ownership."

He also urged quantity surveyors to play a bigger role in Facilities Management. Some of the core skills in this category included:

* Construction, building technology and maintenance costs;
* Estimating and budgeting;
* Cost control and reporting;
* Managing building operations;
* Life Cycle costs;
* Understanding building components and functionality;
* Procuring goods, services and leases;
* Managing contracts and sub-contracts;
* Understanding building management systems; and
* Integrating information and management systems.

"The Green Revolution is not a fad, and the roles of building industry professionals are changing rapidly. An integrated design process is required and for the quantity surveying profession there is the opportunity to stimulate change and attract the right people - and retain their commitment to the profession," he added.

In opening the seminar, Bert van den Heever, president of ASAQS, said a "tsunami of change" was sweeping the planet, with the need to create sufficient renewable energy regarded as critical in many countries of the world. Other speakers and the issues they dealt with included:

* Prof Chrisna du Plessis of the Department of Construction Economics at the University of Pretoria, who warned that buildings were responsible for 90% of greenhouse gases because of the materials selected for construction. "Buildings must support more renewable energy, and the built environment has the biggest mitigation potential," she stated;

* Logan Rangasamy, Head of International Economic Relations and Policy at the SA Reserve Bank, who said that the electricity crisis - likely to last at least another five years in South Africa - created "a huge market for sustainable solutions";

* Henning Holm, architect and energy authority of the Holm and Friends private practice, who said real energy tariff increases had been above inflation since 2003 - and the real cost of energy was the loss of production when energy supplies were disrupted;

* Graham Cruickshank of Ernst & Young, who emphasised the vital role of adequate public transport in a sustainable built environment;

* Wally Weber of Blackdot Energy, who said there was huge untapped potential in South Africa for solar process heating; and

* Alwyn van der Merwe, Director of Investments at Sanlam, who warned that consumer and business confidence was at its lowest ebb in 50 years and that uncertainty regarding production energy supply played a major role in this disenchantment.

In closing the seminar, Larry Feinberg, Executive Director of ASAQS, said industry was South Africa's largest polluter and that the quantity surveying profession would in future have to strongly consider the environmental responsibility and carbon footprint of all companies that formed part of the building supply chain.

* ASAQS is currently conducting an in-depth and ongoing research study for the Green Building Council of SA on the comparative costs of 'green' and conventional design and construction, and a progress report and preliminary findings of the study were revealed to the GBCSA during the Building on Sunshine seminar.
Dr Deen Letchmiah, Board Member of the Association of South African Association of Quantity Surveyors (ASAQS), has warned that sustainable construction places new responsibilities on the quantity surveying profession.

ASAQS is conducting a research study for the Green Building Council of SA on the comparative costs of 'green' and conventional design and construction. Pictured after a preliminary progress report to GBCSA at the ASAQS annual congress in Johannesburg recently were (back row, from left): Dr Deen Letchmiah, Deon Vermeulen, Bert van den Heever, Prof Basie Verster (all ASAQS), Jarrad Lewin and Eric Noir (GBCSA). Front row (from left): Onesimo Dhlwayo (ASAQS), Thulani Kuzwayo (GBCSA), Larry Feinberg, Hoffie Cruywagen, Danie Hoffman (all ASAQS), and Brian Wilkinson (GBCSA).