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Industry groups say competency renewals now urgent

Industry groups representing the quarrying, mining and contracting sectors are warning site managers now have less than six months to meet new health and safety competency requirements.

The Aggregate and Quarry Association (AQA), Institute of Quarrying NZ IOQNZ, Mining/Extractive Health and Safety Council (MinEx) and Civil Contractors New Zealand say without a lift in renewals, the jobs of those who have not met the new requirements are at risk. They say this also provides some risk to the supply of aggregates particularly from smaller producers. Aggregate goes into every building and road in the country.

The industry bodies say if large numbers of site managers have to stand down on December 31 because they haven't renewed their A or B Grade Certificates of Competence (CoCs), there are few, if any, trained replacements. They acknowledge some challenges with gaining new CoCs but say all site managers must have achieved this by December 31. New regulations introduced in December 2014 required Certificate of Competence holders to gain up to four new unit standards.

As recently as late last month at a WorkSafe workshop in Nelson, quarry managers aired concerns about the quality and availability of some CoC training. Currently, around 40% of those sitting a B Grade CoC, required to manage a smaller quarry or opencast mine, are failing the final oral examination.

WorkSafe's Chief Inspector Extractives Mark Pizey told the Nelson meeting that WorkSafe has 602 quarry and mine notified site managers but knows of around 1600 sites.

MinEx chair Chris Baker says there are some teething issues with renewing CoCs but people who manage quarries, mines and other such sites must have these before the year's end.

"We had a one-year extension this year but WorkSafe has made clear there will be no further extension. Frankly we are not seeking one either. People have to get up to speed on the new health and safety competencies."

AQA chair Brian Roche says it is important to note that around 85% of New Zealand aggregate is produced by bigger suppliers who are generally having fewer issues with meeting the new competency requirements than smaller operators.

He says those who still need to pass a new or renewed CoC have to make a choice.

“Either you pass the new competencies or come Christmas you will no longer be a CoC holder and not able to manage a site.”

He and IOQNZ board chair Les Ward are particularly concerned about the potential impact on the quarry sector, especially smaller producers.

“We don’t have a surplus of trained A and B Grade CoC holders. We could see some smaller quarries, in particular, closed as a result,’ said Les Ward.

Civil Contractors NZ chief executive Peter Silcock agrees that while there are still some issues with CoC renewals, especially with smaller members, the risk of contractors losing access to some aggregate supplies was of real concern.

“Our members produce some of their own aggregate but also buy considerable quantities. Employers in the contracting and extractive sector around the country need to ensure site managers renew their CoCs by Christmas. “

The industry groups say they are monitoring the issue and considerable discussion around Certificates of Competence is expected at this week’s QuarryNZ conference in Blenheim.

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