CUTTING CORNERS

ON SITE COULD BE CATASTROPHIC FOR CONTRACTORS

With the pandemic influencing rampant cost-cutting in the building industry, there is a growing danger of neglecting sound site practice which determines concrete performance and infrastructural safety and durability, cautions John Roxburgh, senior lecturer at the School of Concrete Technology, part of Cement and Concrete SA (CCSA).

Roxburgh says the current economic crunch undoubtedly calls for saving costs - but not by sacrificing site expertise. Only contractors with a full grasp of concrete technology will achieve a satisfactory balance between pricing and maintaining their company's credibility, he feels.

With good quality concrete - either batched on-site or delivered there - the contractor has limited time for placing, compaction, finishing, and curing. So, knowing what to expect is vital. Firstly, a good concrete practitioner should assess the quality of the concrete supplied and decide whether it meets specifications or should be rejected. Then the concreting team needs to have timeously established how the concrete will be transported on-site. They must also have organized and implemented placement and compaction methods and ensured that the curing system had been fine-tuned with all necessary equipment and staff standing by," Roxburgh adds.

He says there is a limited time to get concrete placed and compacted, so the work needs to proceed straight away to ensure cracking potential is mitigated and sufficient time to finish the concrete works.

“Sound concrete site practice can only be achieved by ‘concrete wisdom.’ A trained concrete team will know how to prevent segregation in the concrete through mix design and handling. The same applies to preventing the crack formation and for suitable finishing and curing of the concrete. Property-owners whose structures fail within a short period of time are not likely to entrust more work to the under-performing contractors. The cost implications are too important for the developers and, for the contractors concerned, such failures could mean the end of their business,” Roxburgh warns.

He says the School of Concrete Technology’s “SCT20 - Concrete Practice” course is a vital training tool to ensure the best site practice for concrete works. It provides trainees with essential concrete technology concepts and theoretical background to implement trustworthy and proven methods of dealing with concrete on site.

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, the SCT20 training is now offered online as a self-study course at a considerable discount. The SCT lecturers are also available on Zoom or similar platforms to help students encounter any difficulties.

The pandemic is tempting contractors to neglect sound site practice.