

## Risk managers deserve a higher profile

As the Bank of England's most powerful governor, Mervyn King has sweeping powers to curb City excesses. The aim is to prevent another financial crash; one measure being to reduce exposure to risk.

Discussion about risk – and how it could, or should, be mitigated – recently received attention beyond the Square Mile. The volcanic ash cloud in April caused major disruption to travel plans and wiped millions off the revenues of many companies. And the ramifications of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, from lost livelihoods to strained political alliances, are likely to be felt for many years.

These are 'Black Swan' events. They have severe consequences, but are highly unlikely to occur. They are also difficult to predict accurately – even with the best software tools used by experienced risk analysis professionals. However, they serve a useful purpose in raising public awareness of 'risk'.

As a result, today's risk managers and decision-makers potentially have a useful

window of opportunity to illustrate the benefits of their role. Day-to-day risk analysis, focuses on events with a high probability of occurrence, is often not given the prominence it deserves. Many organisations therefore fail to pick up on just how likely something is to occur, and the full impact it may have if it does occur. In contrast, by undertaking the activity informed decisions can be made to mitigate the effects of adverse events, and plans put into place to reduce the consequences.

Although this may not help to avoid catastrophic meltdowns, informed decision-making takes into account what might happen on an everyday basis; thereby saving time, money and stress in the future. It therefore seems reasonable to advocate that intelligent risk analysis and management becomes an integral element of corporate operations.

Risk managers are in an ideal position to progress this change. Sophisticated technology at their fingertips enable

the creation of accurate assessment models. These act as useful business tools to help senior managers make more informed decisions about many aspects of business life. However, it is worth noting that if these methods are to work, the proviso is that model outputs are accepted, even if they don't always give the answer that enables short-term financial gain.

Just as the role of the IT manager has been elevated to CIO, with both feet firmly placed in the boardroom, the same should apply to risk management. Only then can the risk manager be empowered to deliver true strategic value to the organisation and everyone can benefit from the lessons of the past.



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## Catching workplace accidents

Since their introduction some 10 years ago, fall arrest safety nets have gained acceptance as a valuable addition to work at height safety and are now used on the majority of UK and Ireland construction sites. Statistics supplied by its members, and collated by FASET (Fall Arrest Safety Equipment Training), the trade association representing the industry, show that 56 falls 'into nets' occurred in both 2007 and 2008, and indications are that the figure for 2009 will show a similar trend.

FASET believes this data represents just 25-30% of the falls that actually occur. Our experience suggests that the vast majority are never reported to site management, and therefore never find their way into the official statistics. That's surprising, as a fall into a safety net can easily be identified due to the plastic deformation which occurs.

In common with other work at height specialisations, standards and guidance have

either been introduced or modified as the sector evolves. For example, EN 1263-1 2002 was recently amended and now specifies that nets can only be used between the temperature range of -10 to +40 degrees centigrade.

FASET itself has published definitive standards for testing and repairing nets. The first standard covers all aspects of testing, including calibration of the testing machine, the specification and speed of the test, the permissible breaking strength and the way to record results. The second covers the repairing of knotless nets and how, subject to stringent criteria being met, they can be repaired for further use. It has also developed a recommended hierarchy for rigging safety nets, with four methods of access that must be considered in the following order: using remote attachment devices; powered access; ladders and industrial climbing access techniques. It has

also published a technical bulletin specifying the number of operatives allowed to work above a safety net.

A final initiative, backed by both the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS), addresses the growing need for specialist riggers to access open steelwork to rig safety nets for roofs and floors. Qualified CSCS carded riggers who successfully complete a new four-day course in addition to their existing safety net qualifications, will be eligible for FASET Specialist Rigger Certification and CSCS Safety Net Rigger Card endorsement as 'FASET Specialist Rigger'.



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