

Topic: CROSS – collaborative reporting for safer structures

Discussion points

CROSS is a confidential reporting system for structural and fire safety in buildings. Founded 1976 as SCOSS (standing committee on structural safety), it later merged with CROSS-UK in 2021. CROSS is operated by volunteers, supported by ICE and IStructE, and funded by HSE and BSR, the approach was inspired by aviation safety reporting, expanding its scope to include fire safety following the Grenfell fire and Hackitt Review.

Reports are submitted to a select few, anonymized, and reviewed by an expert panel, followed by a legal review before publication. This process aims to identify precursors to injuries and fatalities, with regulatory authorities handling significant incidents. CROSS is also an avenue for HSE to disseminate lessons without compromising legal processes.

Key points:

- Reports are structured and key learning outcomes are identified with reference to safety alerts and industry guidance,
- Some themes have emerged in recurring problems such as inadequate computer modelling, lack of maintenance, and competency gaps in the industry, some specific technical issues also, such as balcony collapses and RAAC (reinforced aerated autoclaved concrete),
- We should note that while many structures are designed and constructed safely, there are ongoing challenges related to design trends, climate change requirements, and a shortage of qualified engineers.

Issues to note:

- CROSS is not a whistleblowing platform. It redirects individuals to regulators for whistleblowing and focuses on learning and sharing safety information,
- CROSS operates as a charity and conducts legal reviews to avoid potential issues associated with prosecutions, particularly concerning safety incidents,
- Funding and sustainability of safety investigation centres around the world is in the spotlight – voluntary efforts can fill some of this gap, potentially in a very flexible way but the group felt that professional efforts and dedicated funding is vital. [CROSS running cost is currently £750k p.a and the group discussed a research proposal currently in flight with the Thomas Ashton Institute),
- For professionals in higher-hazard fields “reading around your subject” should be seen as vital, but organisations must support (and even require) this to happen by giving time and opportunity,
- Other similar resources exist across sectors and engineering disciplines, e.g. for transport and other investigations, professional engineering institutions and across the world.

Key Takeaways

- CROSS is an important resource for sharing lessons on the causes of failures and other guidance for engineers
- Other similar resources are available across sectors and technical disciplines
- Make time to “read around” your subject; require and give your teams time for this too
- Search for general lessons in specific events or issues

Useful links

<https://www.cross-safety.org/uk>
<https://www.icheme.org/knowledge-networks/loss-prevention-bulletin/>
<https://www.csb.gov/>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/air-accidents-investigation-branch>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/rail-accident-investigation-branch>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-accident-investigation-branch>