

# THE RISK MANAGEMENT WEB

**JOE SHAKESPEARE FIIRSM** BELIEVES A GOOD RISK MANAGER SHOULD BE LIKE A SPIDER IN A WEB. IIRSM ASKED HIM TO EXPLAIN HIS THEORY.



Left to right: Minoru Sokei, Director General of Japan Risk Management; James Tye, former Director General of the British Safety Council; and Joe Shakespeare FIIRSM

**T**hroughout my long career in health and safety, I have carried out health and safety risk management presentations and audits for a wide variety of industrial and commercial businesses in the UK and overseas. I started my career in 1940, as an apprentice at diesel engine manufacturer Perkins Engines. I moved into health and safety in 1969, when I was asked if I was interested in a safety officer role. As luck would have it, I knew the business well and so I got the job. I actually rang the chief safety officer at Vauxhall Motors and asked if he could give me any good advice. His response was, "Boy, the only advice I can give you is to flee the country!"

## MEMORABLE MOMENTS

As a loss prevention manager at Perkins Engines, I attempted to look at the whole operational background to safety, security and fire, and integrate them as one department. My team then applied some simple

management techniques to the jobs so that performance could be measured. We didn't introduce a lot of paperwork and headcount wasn't increased in any area. In fact, we had a greater freedom of operation because accident prevention began functioning as part of the business, ensuring safety, loss control and risk management became a total involvement situation.

There were 13 safety committees at Perkins, complete with housekeeping programmes in every department, awarding a performance prize each month. The incentives really worked, as safety representatives were always keen to know how they were doing and it definitely got the 'team message' across. With this programme in place, we decided to apply for the top RoSPA award, the Sir George Earle trophy, which we won. We also received the British Safety Council (BSC) Sword of Honour, which at the time was a new innovation. The two awards were a great tribute to our success.

By the time the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act was introduced in 1974, we were certainly ready for it. We invited

the Press to visit the company so we could show them what we were doing and how the new Act would affect us.

I played a major role in the making of a television documentary management series called 'Workers at Risk: Getting the Facts', which was shown on the BBC. Although it may look a bit dated now, all the information in that short film is still relevant today. A risk manager should be like a spider, with the company as the web. The risk manager can be anywhere in it, but his communications should be such that if a risk touches the web at any point, the vibrations will reach him at once and the risk can be quickly dealt with.

## BUCKLING UP

My career has enabled me to travel to many parts of the world. The first time I went to Toronto, I was greeted by the famous Canadian health and safety officer, Jack Fletcher, who met me at the airport. I got in his car and he never said a word, nor did he start the engine. We sat there for what seemed an eternity and eventually he turned to me and said: "Look boy, we ain't going anywhere until you put that seat belt on!" That was before seat belt legislation was introduced in the UK.

I had a very good working relationship with James Tye, the first BSC Director General. We travelled extensively to promote the BSC and loss control, including spending 11 years in Japan promoting risk management. Unfortunately, James died of a heart attack in 1996, while he was in the House of Commons on BSC business.

In 1983 I set up my own consultancy. Health and safety and risk management has provided me with a high level of job satisfaction and a chance to meet many wonderful and dedicated people within the world of safety.

*Joe Shakespeare is a Fellow of IIRSM*

