



News, Views & Comments from the World of Building Service Contracting

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ARGENTINA-BUENOS AIRES

Inflation A Major Concern As Economy Expands

A consulting company in Buenos Aires claims that the annual inflation rate in Argentina may be 17 percent and the Argentine Central Bank is deeply concerned about the current level of inflation. Consumer prices in Argentina rose 8.7 percent in August 2007 for the same period in 2006, representing the third-fastest rate reported in South America. In addition, the National Statistics Institute reported the economy, the second-largest in South America after Brazil, expanded 8.6 percent in July 2007 over July 2006. The annual growth was higher than the 7.5 percent median forecast in a Bloomberg survey of eight economists.

AUSTRALIA-CANBERRA

Businesses Will Reduce Costs With New Regulation

The Australian government announced a new government regulation requiring that 30,000 gigawatt hours each year come from low-emission sources by 2020 will lead to savings for businesses that operate in more than one state or territory. By consolidating the existing state schemes, many of which are contradictory, businesses would avoid red tape and hence recognize reduced costs, which result from having to comply with the different schemes in various parts of the country. The program will rely on technologies that emit less than 200kg of greenhouse gases per megawatt hour including solar, geothermal, wind and wave energy and also electricity generated by the use of fossil fuels and will result in an estimated energy saving of 15 percent.

AUSTRALIA-VICTORIA

Association Seeks To Dump AWAs

The Australian Cleaning Contractors Association, representing 150 contract cleaning companies, is going to eliminate Australian Workplace Agreements or AWAs because of claims that they are complex and pointless. After the government introduced the fairness test in May, the association was told to either pay its workers another 66 cents an hour or alter the AWA so it reflects the award pay rates and conditions relevant to each state. The association is considering a return to the award system or enterprise agreements. The Building Service Contractors Association of Australia, which represents about 1100 cleaning contractors, will continue with AWAs.

BELGIUM-BRUSSELS

Commission Aims To Improve Adult Learning

In order to remain competitive in the global economy and remove the barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning activities, the European Commission is calling on Member States to work together and support the EU's Action Plan on Adult Learning. The Action Plan seeks to have adults continue to learn, to keep up and to adapt to change by making adult learning as easy and as accessible as possible. The main thrust is to help build an efficient adult learning system throughout Europe. The Action Plan includes providing the opportunity for adults to progress and to raise their qualification levels, since the working population is continually aging; assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups by engaging all stakeholders such as employers and governments because there is

evidence that recognizing skills acquired non-formally and informally could lead to important savings in time and money; and utilizing a common language to overcome the misunderstandings and the lack of comparable data in the sector.

CANADA-BRITISH COLUMBIA

Two-Month Investigation Reveals Janitor Theft

A contractor working as a janitor at a Canadian Post Office in Duncan was arrested September 6th after a two-month investigation revealed the janitor had hoarded mail. Investigators found 300 pieces of mail, including consumer goods and gift cards, at the janitor's home and in the janitor's vehicle.

CANADA-QUEBEC

Quebec To Ban Phosphates In Detergents

Blue-green algae, known scientifically as cyanobacteria, have infested 156 lakes in Quebec this year and scientists claim excess phosphorus - as well as nitrogen and carbon - have fuelled the algae's growth over the last decade. In an effort to curb the algae growth the Quebec government will require dishwashing detergents to be phosphate free, as phosphates in dishwashing detergents, one of the sources for blue-green algae growth, add 5 to 20 percent more phosphorus to a lake. The ban will take effect as early as this fall. While nationally no action has been taken, Quebec will pass the regulation as part of a 10-year, \$200-million beefed-up program to curb the algae.

CHINA-HONG KONG

Air Quality Affects The Health Of Children

The number of poor visibility days has more than doubled - from 15 percent in 1995 to 50 percent in 2004 and The Council for Sustainable Development has been conducting a survey on how to achieve better air quality. The survey, which began on June 2nd and will end on October 15th, has received 20,000 responses to date. The vice chairman of the Hong Kong Asthma Society notes the effect of air pollution is often directly related to the level of pollutants and claims that the number of deaths caused by air pollution annually in the city drops from 1,600

to 800 and the number of hospitalizations per year, drops from 64,000 bed days to 36,000 bed days if the rating for clean air improves from average to "good," rather than from average to "better."

FRANCE-PARIS

Strategies For Economy Will Face Opposition

Newly elected Nicolas Sarkozy plans to energize the French economy by reforming workers' benefits, reducing the civil service by 22,000 workers and changing rules for unemployment and the 35-hour work week. Sarkozy came into office saying reform was necessary for France to compete effectively in the global economy. France has been famously protective of its long vacations, short work weeks and generous benefits that allow people to retire as early as 50 years of age, so it will be a major victory if Sarkozy succeeds.

GERMANY-BERLIN

Unemployment At Lowest Rate In 15 Years

The Federal Labor Agency announced the unadjusted jobless rate at 8.4 percent was at its lowest level since December 1992. After a two-year period of economic stagnation, the current recovery is powered by exports into a growing world economy. The labor agency predicts unemployment will average 3.8 million over the course of the year with an average jobless rate of 10.8 percent. The unadjusted jobless rate peaked at 12.6 percent in February 2005 with a post-World War II record of 5.216 million.

JAPAN-TOKYO

Trade Surplus Surges In August

Japan's trade surplus grew 287.6 percent in August 2007 over the same period in August 2006 as the result of strong auto exports although the trade surplus is expected to remain moderate in growth through the rest of the year due to an expected slowdown in the global economy. Trade surpluses with Asia, the US and the European Union increased to 63.3 percent, 15.0 percent and 27.5 percent respectively.

NEW ZEALAND-QUEENSTOWN

Hospital Examining Policies After Scare

Two adults and 11 children were told there was a slim risk they had contracted Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD) because the same sterilized surgical instruments used on a 30-year old woman were used in their operations at Auckland City Hospital. A coroner's report confirmed the woman died from the rare brain disease CJD. While sterilizing surgical instruments does not necessarily prevent the spread of the disease, the Auckland District Hospital Board chief medical officer claims the chance of any of the patients involved developing the disease remains extremely small. The hospital board said it will be assessing the feasibility of single-use instruments and separating instruments for cleaning.

SOUTH KOREA-SEOUL

Women In Their 20s On Track To Pass Men

If current trends persist, more women in their twenties will be employed than their male counterparts in the next few years. According to a report by the National Statistical office, the employment rate of women in their 20s has steadily increased to 59.7 percent in the second quarter of 2007 from 54.9 percent in 2000 while the employment rate of men in their 20s has decreased from 66 percent in 2000 to 60.7 percent. However, in the overall employment rate, 71.3 percent of men were employed versus 48.8 percent of women, a 22.5 percent gap. In contrast, the gender gap in employment across the 27 European Union countries was an average of 14.8 percent in 2005, ranging from 3.8 percent in Finland to 24 percent in Spain.

TAIWAN-TAIPEI

Taiwan Falls In Middle With Corruption Perception

The 2007 Corruption Perception Index, a composite index drawing on 16 polls and surveys from 10 independent institutions on the perceived degree of corruption among officials and politicians, ranked Taiwan 34th among 179 countries. The ranking represents a decline from 2006 with a grade of 5.7 versus 5.9. Denmark, New Zealand and Finland tied for the number one spot in the index while in Asia, Singapore was ranked 4th, Hong Kong

14th, Japan 17th, South Korea 43rd and China 72nd. Experts claim the country needs to crack down on political corruption and high-ranking officials to improve its ranking.

THE NETHERLANDS-AMSTERDAM

Unemployment Down

An average 342 thousand people or 4.4 percent of the labor force were unemployed in the Netherlands from June through August 2007, down from 5.3 percent in the same period of 2006. The decrease was larger for men than for women as the unemployment rate is 3.5 percent for men versus 5.6 percent for women.

UK-LONDON

Cleaners Need Training

According to a ward housekeeper with 14 years experience in the NHS, many staff become discouraged when comments such as the statement made by Prime Minister Gordon Brown that superbugs were only now a priority, are made in the press. The cleaner said the staff work very hard but need more training such as NVQs and a certificate from the British Institute of Cleaning in addition to more pay.

UK-LONDON

Prime Minister Requires Deep Clean For All Hospitals

An initiative, introduced by the new Health Minister Lord Darzi, will require walls, ceilings, fittings and ventilation shafts in every hospital in Britain to be disinfected and scrubbed clean ward by ward over the next year. NHS trusts will determine the cleaning schedules, which could lead to wards being closed for a week at a time. According to the latest infection figures from the Health Protection Agency, there were 1,444 cases of Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bloodstream infections, in the first quarter of 2007, down from 1,542 in the fourth quarter of 2006.

US-CALIFORNIA

Cleaning Company Helps Fight Cancer

Spencer Dean, the owner of MasterCare cleaning in Goleta donates his cleaning services to cancer patients. Dean began donating cleaning services to cancer patients after watching both his mother and sister suffer from breast cancer. The company provides three free monthly cleanings. After that cancer patients receive three cleanings at half off. The women undergoing cancer treatment who receive the service are deeply appreciative, not only of the physical support but also of the clean environment while they are recovering.

US-KENTUCKY

Company Strives To Be Good Neighbor

Sixty-three residents living near the Heaven Hill Distillery plant in Louisville are receiving a free, one-time cleaning of their homes courtesy of the plant. Residents have complained for years that a gritty, black substance has covered their homes. The residents claim that it takes extraordinary effort to remove the unseemly black from the exterior of their homes. While scientists are unsure of the substances' origin and it has never been viewed as harmful and damaging, Heaven Hill is offering the one-time cleaning service as a gesture of good will based on the slim chance that ethanol may have contributed to the problem. Fantastic Finishes, the company contracted to do the cleanings, has done about 20 of the homes so far. While Heaven Hill is paying for the cleaning, it claims it is not responsible for the problem.

US-MASSACHUSETTS

Training Standards For Cleaners To Be Implemented

After grease buildup from the kitchen exhaust pipe at Tai Ho Mandarin and Cantonese Restaurant fueled a fire in August that killed two firefighters, the Boston City Council is considering legislation that would establish training and certification requirements for cleaning contractors

hired by restaurants to remove excess grease from kitchen vents. When workers cleaned the stove in June, they cleaned the stove below and the roof above, but did not clean the crucial area in between. While national fire codes, which Massachusetts adopted several years ago, require that kitchen exhaust ducts be cleaned by a properly trained, qualified, and certified company or person, Boston does not mandate any training or certification, and grease-cleaning industry specialists say that has fostered an environment in which virtually anyone can go into the business of cleaning highly flammable grease from restaurant ducts. The Council aims to implement the training standards for grease cleaners as soon as possible.

US-TEXAS

Janitors Sickened During Routine Cleaning At School

Seven janitors became sick in early September after inhaling bleach fumes during routine cleaning at Key Middle School in northeastern Houston. A report by ICU Environmental, Health & Safety to the school district indicated the workers were exposed to irritating cleaning fumes and not mold. School officials claim a number of inspections and experts have not found any unusual levels of mold or other potential problems at the school. However, staff have claimed there are bad smells and visible mold and mildew on the walls. While, a small amount of mold was found in one annex building, the sickened janitors were working elsewhere at the time and officials say the school is safe and will be open to students. The janitors were treated at a nearby hospital and released.

UPCOMING EVENTS

17th Congress of the World Federation of Building Service Contractors

Buenos Aires, Argentina

October 26-29, 2008

Visit the WFBSC website at www.wfbsc.org for more information.



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