

Media Release

Recognition for CERA feats in quake aftermath

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Senior engineers working for the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) in the aftermath of the February 2011 earthquake have been honoured for their innovative handling of critically damaged and dangerous tall buildings.

John O'Hagan, who was contracted to CERA from ISP Consulting Engineers, and Carl Devereux, contracted from Aurecon, have been recognised by the Association of Consulting Engineers for their work on the demolition of critically damaged tall buildings in Christchurch such as the Hotel Grand Chancellor, where there was a risk of total collapse in further aftershocks.

The demolition of the 26-storey Grand Chancellor was described by one leading United States expert as one of the most challenging demolition projects he had seen in 50 years in his industry. Others such as the Copthorne Durham Hotel and Clarendon Tower also posed a risk of collapse prior to being demolished.

Messrs O'Hagan and Devereux, along with engineering firm Structex, were jointly recognised with a merit award at the Innovate NZ Awards of Excellence ceremony in Tauranga on Saturday 27 July. CERA's work as an organisation was also recognised.

With no international guidelines on how to deal with severely earthquake-damaged tall buildings, the engineers developed a series of methodologies for the safe and controlled demolition of the buildings, and supervised the demolition through to completion.

Acting CERA chief executive Warwick Isaacs said the award was deserving recognition for the outstanding work CERA engineers had done in the difficult period after the February 2011 quake.

"John, Carl and others working with, and alongside CERA, were facing unknown territory to a large extent with these badly damaged tall buildings," Mr Isaacs says.

"The risk of the buildings collapsing in further aftershocks was a very real one, and it's a testament to their skill and professionalism that we were able to demolish those buildings without collapse and any further deaths."

Mr Isaacs said the Government had shown its commitment to workplace safety in Christchurch with the signing earlier this month of the Canterbury Rebuild Safety Charter, developed by leaders from the construction and insurance industries.

John Weber, past chairman of the United States Demolition Association and part of the US-led Government Advisory team to Christchurch after the February quake, said he had participated in demolitions and clean-up of buildings after earthquakes around the US, but he was not prepared for what he saw in Christchurch.

The successful demolition of the Hotel Grand Chancellor and others such as the Copthorne Durham Hotel and Clarendon Tower "sets a standard for exceptional performance," Mr Weber said.

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"All who were involved in the planning, engineering, and prosecution of the work should be highly commended," he said.

Mr O'Hagan continues to work for CERA as a project director with the Christchurch Central Development Unit, while Mr Devereux has returned to his duties at Aurecon.