

FULLY FRANK

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Act now, or face life in a Cole climate

CORPORATE scandals like the AWB crisis cause Katherine Teh-White to wince.

On one level they show how high the costs can climb when a company fails to address ethical or environmental issues.

And on another they demonstrate a missed opportunity for a business that could have saved a lot of money by acting earlier.

As the managing director of sustainability consultant Futureye, she knows all too well that the longer companies hide skeletons in their closets, the more expensive the eventual fix becomes.

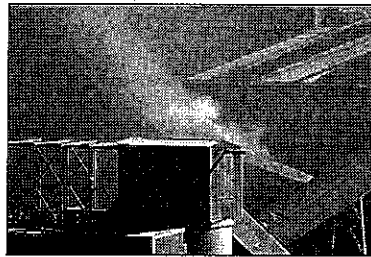
And equally, the earlier a proactive approach is taken to engaging the community and stakeholders, the faster new business opportunities can be grasped.

"You have got the choice at any point in time to deal with things differently and obviously the costs associated with that go up, depending on how late you leave it," said Teh-White, who founded the rapidly expanding Futureye in 2002.

"If you start changing and resolving the issues before they really become significant the costs are much lower than when you wait until there is a Volker Report or there is about to be a Cole Inquiry.

"Then the consequences tend to get more and more costly."

Some of Teh-White's recent clients tackling problems with legacy sites are already showing the benefits of creating a vision for sustainability and of corporate social responsibility.



Dusty: OneSteel at Whyalla.

After extensive consultation with residents at Port Pirie, where Zinifex operates a large lead and zinc smelter, a less combative and more co-operative relationship with residents was forged.

And targets to reduce blood lead levels in children were given a much higher priority after being identified as the top priority by the community.

Similarly, the community of Whyalla is now being consulted in a bid to mitigate OneSteel's red dust problem that had led to the formation of local action groups.

Teh-White said it was much better for companies to act before people became really angry with them.

"The implications for companies are that people get more and more cynical, more and more distrusting and the solutions for them might be far more costly.

"It is all about reducing the gaps between how people think you should be conducting a business and how you actually conduct a business."