

Cartel-buster's request follows concerns raised by independent precast and ready-mixed producers

Call for OFT cartel probe into concrete and cement

By Paul Thompson

CARTEL-busters probing the concrete and cement supply markets are to write to the Office of Fair Trading in a bid to persuade the watchdog to investigate the sector formally.

Specialist investigator Cartel Damage Claims is hoping to convince the consumer champion to look into concerns raised by independent precast and ready mixed concrete producers about cement supply and pricing.

It was called in by industry body the British Aggregates Association earlier

this year to help collate evidence against cement suppliers following complaints from members.

CDC is halfway through the first phase of its investigation and believes it will have enough price-fixing evidence by the end of its initial probe to instigate proceedings against suppliers.

But it is calling for the OFT to step in straight away. CDC director Seamus Maye said: "We are slowly collecting all the evidence but I have written to the OFT to inform them of our progress and highlight the fact that cement suppliers have a history of market distortion. We

have yet to reach any firm conclusions, but there would appear to be significant patterns of behaviour to merit further investigation."

Mr Maye called for more independent producers to come forward with any information they may have.

He said: "It is very difficult for independents to put their heads above the parapet but I can assure them that any evidence we receive will be treated in the strictest confidence.

"We would urge them to come forward with any correspondence they have had over cement supply such as

invoices, letters and contracts that could help the investigation."

Robert Durward, director of independent quarryier group the British Aggregates Association, echoed the call for more companies to submit evidence but claimed many quarry operators had offered more information during the Hillhead quarrying show.

He said: "The number of people prepared to talk to us and voice their concerns has been encouraging. We believe there is enough evidence out there to prove to the OFT that it needs to act."

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