



**CARROT AND STICKS:** Dr Kaufman (left) making a point during a discussion with other scientists and academicians on safety issues in the laboratory. With him is Dr Prapaipit C Ternai (right) of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

# 'Catch them young on work safety'

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**KUCHING:** Health and safety subjects should be started in primary schools so that young people are already well-grounded when they enter the workforce.

Laboratory Safety Institute (LSI) president and chief executive officer Dr James A Kaufman, who is an expert in laboratory safety from the US, said in his 25 years of studying, he did not know much about safety until he worked for a chemical company.

"I learnt more about safety in one day (in his employment) than I had in 25 years of school, he made the candid disclosure when met at the 'World Conference on Safety in Science, Industry and Education' with this year's theme "Caring about Health and Safety' at Unimas here yesterday.

According to Kaufman, in a laboratory environment, schools and colleges appeared to have an accident rate of 10 to 100 times greater than in the chemical industry in the hey-days and "today 40 years later, we are getting better but still have a long way to go," he lamented.

His advice on general safety, be it in a general work place or laboratory, is that people can always adapt to their work environment, starting from scratch, unless there is a developed programme.

On the main issue worldwide on work safety, Kaufman pointed out that the senior manager and administrator need to be clearly committed and involved in safety programmes in their organisation.

"People (employees or students who work in laboratory) need to

know that the management of the organisation that they are in, are serious about safety with rules and regulations or set standards to comply with and be followed," he said.

"There are also consequences when the policies are enforced and if nobody followed the policies, then the policies are mere lip service," he said.

According to him, working safely must be a condition of employment.

"You need to have rules and the rules need to be enforced. If you rather not follow the rules you are saying, you rather not work here and you are happy working somewhere else," he stressed.

Kaufman pointed out that the management has to be committed to that and at the same time you need have to have balance of carrots (rewards) and sticks (discipline).

Workingsafely must be a condition of employment and is a discipline issue, rewarding is on work safety performance," he said.

Kaufman disclosed that LSI has created a national award for the principal investigator with the best laboratory safety programme in a research group so that people get recognition for a good job done.

He said the safety standard will vary from country to country where some are more advanced.

"LSI had been asked by countries to help in this matter and people (organisations) can always refer to World Health Organisation's Bio-Safety Manual or even the American Chemical Societies to establish safety policies and standards. But in general, the standard of safety varies from country to country," he said.