

Changing Safety Behaviours

Through respect for people

The Construction Task Force, chaired by Sir John Egan, published a report on the scope for improving the quality and efficiency of UK construction. The report, 'Rethinking Construction', recognised the excellence of parts of the industry but concluded that, as a whole, it was under-achieving.

'Rethinking Construction' identified targets for improvement in construction productivity, profits, defect and accident reduction. The report concluded that one of the ways of achieving industry improvement was to change the way people are treated. This led to the follow-on report, 'Respect for People'.

This report concluded that change and improvement only happen through people and in particular the efforts of the workforce. Providing respect and the right conditions to support their endeavours are essential.

Ultimately, this means showing respect to both our workforce and supervision, while simultaneously winning their respect. The report concluded that, without this change, firms would also fail to recruit and retain the best talent, already a challenge, as the industry is often seen as being unsafe, dirty and "macho". However, in Foster Wheeler Energy Limited we have long recognised that 'Respect for People' is fundamental to continuously improving safety performance and overall efficiency.

Indeed, without genuine respect for people, how can one hope to change the safety behaviours of the workforce? It is not tenable, for example, for managers to claim to be concerned about the safety of their employees and "want everyone to go home fit and well at the end of their shift" if they do not provide such basic facilities as hot water for hand-washing. The clear message to workers in such cases is that management is simply paying lip service to their welfare. ►





At Foster Wheeler, we believe that it is only by building our Health, Safety & Environmental (HSE) programmes on a foundation of genuine commitment to people that we can truly change behaviours and achieve best-in-class safety performance.

An example of how this can be achieved in practice is the 730-megawatt Combined Heat and Power Station at Immingham (ICHP) for ConocoPhillips, for which Foster Wheeler is the engineering procurement and construction management contractor.

Introduction to site (first impressions count)

The integrated project team, comprising ConocoPhillips' ICHP team and Foster Wheeler, recognised that it is important to win the hearts and minds of the workforce from the start, so the best possible welfare facilities and HSE programme were put in place as early as possible. Employees' and subcontractors' first impressions of the site had to be positive – so a well laid out car park with tarmac roads and gravelled parking bays was constructed.

All 'new starters' on site attended an HSE induction - nothing unusual in that. But in this case, every induction session at the ICHP site was opened by ConocoPhillips' site manager who personally expressed his commitment to ensuring workers' health and safety whilst on the project. This presentation was always well received, so much so that he frequently received plaudits from hardened construction workers who had never experienced such a personal statement of management commitment at previous inductions. But consider how empty his words would have seemed if, on arrival, they had to park in a muddy field, with a separate levelled and surfaced section set aside for the clients' construction staff, an all too common example of dual standards found on many other major projects.

So, having set the scene it was essential that the integrated team continued to build on the positive first impressions. Paying attention to the 'little things' was very important. The site cabins were provided with microwaves and refrigerators and, instead of benches, chairs were provided. Toilet blocks throughout the site were kept clean and always had paper towels and hot water. A bright and airy canteen was provided, with drinking water fountains around the site.

Occupational health facilities were available, with a full-time nurse on site, who spent much of her time looking after minor ailments, providing health advice and arranging appointments with local GPs for those who were living away from home.

Training and competence

The project required that everyone from the site managers down attended the two-day Client/Contractor National Safety Group Safety Passport Course, with an additional day's training for supervisors.

The team decided that the 'passport' courses would be run on site. This had the advantage that the client and contractor managers attended alongside the workforce, and this helped engender a common safety culture at all levels. An IOSH Managing Safety Course was also run on site and attended by managers, supervisors and worker safety representatives.

In addition, first aid, confined space and permit to work training were also provided on site and the contractors shared their own training programmes with each other. ►



Communication

Having addressed the physical requirements of our HSE strategy, the team then had to close the loop by ensuring two-way communications at all levels.

The writer recently asked a welder on a successful project about the effectiveness of communication on the site. He responded that "...in 25 years in the industry, this had been the first project where a manager had actually asked his opinion on anything!"

We may believe that we are communicating well, but as a colleague discovered recently when he carried out a survey on safety behaviours, on a large project this is not always the case. He found that, whilst the majority of managers and employees agreed that good communication was important in achieving excellent HSE performance, their differing views of its effectiveness on the project was telling :

Manager - "I communicate with my workers – look at these e-mails, posters, and procedures I have issued."

Workers - "Our manager never communicates with us; we never see him. All he does is send us e-mails, pin up posters and impose procedures."

On the ICHP project, embracing the view that 'it's good to talk', the team put in place a whole range of tools to encourage good communication including daily pre-task talks, weekly toolbox talks, safety suggestion and observation boxes (with awards for best suggestions), and safety sampling. This was underpinned by a weekly HSE meeting, chaired by the Foster Wheeler resident construction manager and attended by contractors' HSE advisors and workforce safety representatives.

In order to be effective, there had to be clearly visible leadership, commitment and action by management. This was achieved by ensuring that all reasonable issues raised were actioned immediately, and all safety suggestions and observations were published and posted in the canteen, together with the actions that had been taken. In addition, the weekly HSE meeting was a forum where all recent feedback was reviewed and the strategies revised as required, there and then, with all attendees being given the opportunity to contribute.

In addition to the weekly meeting above, ConocoPhillips suggested that two Senior Management meetings were put in place. These were Tier 1, a meeting held every two months, attended by directors from each of the contractors, the signatories to the project 'safety commitment statement', and Tier 2, a fortnightly meeting, attended by contractors' site management and visiting corporate HSE managers.

Both of these meetings not only demonstrated real management commitment to HSE, but also helped to develop a truly integrated team approach, sharing of lessons learned and regular 'cold eyes reviews'.

HSE success to date on the ICHP project has been achieved by demonstrating to the workforce that the integrated project team management's commitment goes beyond talk to action in the field to ensure workers' welfare and prevent accidents and incidents.

The alliance formed between ConocoPhillips, Foster Wheeler and all subcontractors has engendered a positive and open attitude, essential for improving our HSE performance. With continuous dialogue, additional training, the introduction of fresh initiatives, and promotion of safety awareness, all parties contributed to establishing a health safety culture across the site.

There is no question that the introduction of safety representatives to the weekly safety meetings with management is achieving alignment on project goals. This forum gave the workforce an opportunity to voice any concerns and suggest improvements to reduce risks on site, knowing that their views were valued.

The added value of ConocoPhillips' active and enthusiastic participation and support cannot be understated. Their role in the development of, and commitment to, the HSE strategy ensured that the right material resources were mobilised at the right time. Payback has come in many forms, including a well-motivated workforce, lack of industrial relations problems and no abuse of the facilities.

Recognition of success

The project's health and safety performance was recently recognised with the National Joint Council for the Engineering Construction Industry's (NJC) Award for Safety in Engineering Construction.

In making the award, the NJC Health and Safety Committee noted many positive aspects of the project including: ➤



- *Comprehensive and project-specific pre-planning before the project commenced*
- *Sophisticated procedures devised for sharing views between management and stakeholders, particularly in the site Health and Safety meetings*
- *A very high HSE profile, maintained at all levels throughout the site for the duration of the project*
- *A genuine commitment to the involvement of employees, particularly via suggestions and award schemes*
- *A notable emphasis on identifying and delivering training needs*
- *A convincing indication of genuinely active and sustained promotion of HSE topics across the whole site at all levels and in a range of appropriate formats*
- *A range of “cultural” HSE initiatives*

But perhaps the most satisfying recognition of the project team’s achievements came from the workforce safety representatives, who identified the following as the key to our success:

- *Excellent welfare facilities*
- *Appointment of safety representatives who attended and participated at safety meetings*
- *Weekly shop stewards’ meetings*
- *IOSH Managing Safety courses made available to safety reps*
- *Opportunity to speak to management and get the right level of feedback*
- *Daily HSE advisor meeting allowed swift response to any problems highlighted to Safety Reps which HSE Advisors took to the meeting and raised for discussion. It is a fact that safety is taken seriously and that a healthy safety culture has been promoted with everyone being invited to participate: it hasn’t been a case of ‘lip service’*

So, if you want to change the safety behaviours of the workforce, look first to the management team’s behaviours – are managers really demonstrating a genuine HSE focus? Take care of the details, be seen to take suggestions seriously and implement them without delay.

Behavioural safety tools are wasted unless managers are genuinely committed and not ‘just paying lip service’. ■

Useful Website: www.rethinkingconstruction.org.uk Source for ‘Rethinking Construction’ and ‘Respect for People’ reports

About the author

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David has had a high profile in the engineering construction industry. He has served on the European Construction Institute HSE task force, the Engineering Construction Industry Association (ECIA) Health & Safety Committee and the ECIA Industrial Relations Committee where he was involved substantially in the development of the exacting health and safety standards associated with the construction and maintenance of process plants, such as power stations, refineries, chemical facilities and pharmaceutical plants.

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