

BAE Systems Aerostructures case study

Company profile

The Aerostructures business is wholly owned by BAE SYSTEMS and offers the design and integration of airframe structure solutions to the world's leading commercial aircraft manufacturers, capitalising on engineering, supply chain and project management expertise. Their health and safety mission statement is as follows:

'We are committed to becoming world leaders in health, safety and environmental management by providing a world-class working environment for our employees.'

To enable Aerostructures to achieve that vision, the business is focused on two key deliverables:

- the successful integration of SHE management into all the relevant business processes to ensure effective business leadership;
- involving, communicating, developing and training our greatest asset: our people.

Our programme of continuous improvement embraces these aspects and our management programmes ensure that we plan, monitor and achieve our objectives.



Taking pride in achievement

Des Browne MP, Minister of State for Work, visited BAE SYSTEMS Aerostructures business at Prestwick on 12 February 2004 in response to an invitation from the AMICUS Trade Union representatives. The trade unions were keen to demonstrate to the Minister, who has responsibility for health and safety, how they have worked closely with BAE SYSTEMS management to develop a safe and healthy working environment for the employees that reaches beyond the standards required by legislation.

Steve Ryan, the AMICUS representative who extended the invitation to the Minister said, 'This visit promotes the belief that, where trade union representatives are involved with health and safety in the workplace, accident and incident rates can be significantly reduced.'

As part of the visit, Scott McLarty, the Business Improvement Director responsible for the safety, health and environmental strategy in the Aerostructures business, spent time sharing the benefits of the partnership approach to success in health and safety. Scott commented, 'Providing a safe and healthy working environment for our employees is of the utmost importance, and involving the employees and trade unions is fundamental to achieving that success.'

The Minister completed his visit with a tour of three areas of the site where the working partnership has brought about real improvements for both the business and the employees. Commenting on his visit Des Browne said, 'The work at BAE SYSTEMS Aerostructures demonstrates an excellent partnership approach to health and safety in the workplace, one that could be an example to other employers.'

'Sharing is learning'

The importance of providing a safe and healthy environment for employees is reflected in the partnership approach demonstrated between the company and the trade unions. AMICUS supports the principles of Best Practice sharing, and AMICUS representatives based within BAE SYSTEMS Aerostructures take part in the Scottish Trade Union Council health and safety forum as well as supporting the Hazards campaigns by attending and organising meetings and conferences locally, nationally and within Europe. The partnership has evolved into an effective working relationship that allows the business to go beyond mere compliance with health and safety law. It increases individuals' involvement in decisions about how the risks of their work are managed and improves workplace performance by enhancing the quality of working life for employees.

Improved health and safety performance also reduces accidents and ill health costs to the business, and helps improve profitability, workforce commitment and morale. There are numerous other hidden advantages, such as improvements in service, and product quality and delivery. This is why a partnership approach to this priority issue reaps benefits for all concerned.

Partnership working can significantly contribute to the process of managing change, eg by identifying, preventing and controlling any potential adverse health effects or risks in operating processes. Such an approach is only possible with open communication, open access to information and joined-up approaches to problem solving. The benefits are reflected in the way that unions and the company develop their partnerships at work, and make decisions and deliver improvements.

A joint partnership approach to health and safety has resulted in the company providing a high level of training for safety representatives and, in return, the trade unions' resource is embraced as a core method for carrying out tasks as diverse as:

- risk assessment;
- accident investigation;
- multi-layered auditing systems;
- COSHH assessments;
- selection and rationalisation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- the assessment of vibration;
- delivering part of the onsite training.

The benefits of a partnership approach

The benefits include a strong underpinning of health and safety processes within the organisation, improved safety culture and increased employee self-awareness. External auditors praised the quality of work carried out by the trade unions during a recent audit, commenting on 'the positive contributions from capable, positively orientated safety representatives.' The endorsement proves that well-trained, proactive safety representatives can provide significant benefits to all employees across the site and across the whole of the Aerostructures business. The partnership has led to a solid foundation where all parties can move forward in an open environment to achieve common goals. The rights of the trade union representatives within the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 have been vastly superseded by the actions taken onsite.