

Allison Homes Eastern Limited

Worker engagement case study 4

This case study is part of a series of case studies, which give examples of best practice when engaging workers to improve health and safety in the workplace.

Allison Homes recently acquired a small house-building company. Following site visits and audits, the directors and safety advisor were immediately aware that attitudes to a safe working environment on site, subcontractors in particular, were very different to the strong safety culture that runs through other Kier Group businesses.

The challenge

The challenge was to establish a safety culture, to enable houses to be designed and built safely with constant thought of customers' living demands and safe systems of maintenance.

Driving the company forward

Allison Homes promotes worker engagement to encourage each member of staff to feel that they are valued members of the company, whose input and action is just as important as that of the board of directors.

The company has a robust system of consultation and provides opportunities for discussion and exchange of views. All workers are required to undergo induction training on entry to an Allison Homes site. Subcontractors are encouraged to take on board the values of Allison Homes, and to take responsibility as employers for developing the competence of their own workers, particularly through the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.

Health and safety is taken extremely seriously at every level of the company, from the board of directors right through to the site teams and operatives.

'We are always striving to find new methods and initiatives in which the workforce can be involved while working towards a safe site environment, as well as reviewing and improving existing systems. Suggestions are welcome from all levels of the business and our construction managers and safety advisors pride themselves on being approachable.'

Michael O'Farrell, Managing Director

Company fact file

Allison Homes Eastern Limited is a regional house builder, operating within Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, and building about 500 homes a year. The company became part of the Kier Group in 2001.

Allison Homes currently operates 14 active sites at any one time, involving the activities of about 850 workers. A typical site has anything up to 25 houses under construction at a time, with a wide range of construction hazards present.



Figure 1 Lockable water butt

Using site initiatives such as subcontractor performance reviews and utility service markers enables the whole team on site to be involved and realise the importance of health and safety. Quarterly safety initiatives are delivered by toolbox talks to all staff and subcontractors.

Allison Homes has a 'Subcontractor of the month' award, which is presented by a director. It helps subcontractors and suppliers to realise the level of workmanship and performance that is expected from them, and recognises for their efforts.

The board of directors meets with the main subcontractors twice a year to discuss the changing needs of the business, and for feedback on how the company can improve the quality of information provided to the workforce.

Safety initiatives on site

Allison Homes uses worker engagement to drive the company forward through a series of innovations and initiatives, some put forward by the workforce, demonstrating a commitment to



Figure 2 Workers digging after the issue of a permit to dig



Figure 3 A site service marker

improving health and safety standards on site. Three examples of site initiatives are described below.

Lockable water butts

Lockable water butts are provided on every site, either within the site boundary or in the site compound. In the event that children enter the site, the lockable lids prevent unauthorised access and the risk of drowning. This procedure also benefits the site team, as the system allows the fork-lift truck driver to load the water butts in position, ready for the day's work.

'Having the water butts filled and ready to use allows my operatives to go straight to site and start work on the plots. We all know that when we're on an Allison's site the water butts are prepared ready for us.'

Simon Howard, Howard Plastering

Service markers and permit-to-dig notices

Service markers are put in place the moment service trenches are back-filled by the groundwork or service contractor. They clearly mark the line of each service using a colour-coded flag: yellow for gas; red for electric; grey for BT; and blue for water. Trench digging is controlled by the permit-to-dig system, which sets out the safe system of work for the site team and the contractor involved. The permit will be discussed with the digging team before any work is started.

The service markers provide a clear and constant reminder of the potential hazards below ground. They are highly visible, and can be clearly recognised and understood, even by visitors to the site. When used together, the service markers and permit to dig provide a safer system of work for site personnel.

'I have developed a set of wickets which enable the markers to be positioned higher and be even more noticeable for the trades. Since introducing the site markers I've not had a cable strike on my site.'

Martin Wade, Site agent

'Don't Walk By' campaign

This Kier Group-driven campaign is a vital part of Allison Homes' initiative to promote feedback from workers. It encourages everybody on site to report near misses and unsafe conditions to site managers immediately, so that action can be taken to control the risk and prevent accidents and injuries.

The campaign is a highly visual and easy-to-understand way of reinforcing the importance of health and safety, and that every member of the company has responsibility for it. It was introduced and discussed through toolbox talks on site, on staff notice boards and among office management.

'The *Don't Walk By* campaign is in place on all our sites and also visible within our new head office. It is just as important for administrative staff to understand the importance of safety on sites or in the workplace as it is for people working on our sites.'

Debbie Dobbs, Construction Secretary

The business benefits

Allison Homes has seen a number of business benefits as a result of promoting worker engagement, including:

- a month-on-month improvement in the accident rate, which is below half that of the industry average;
- a month-on-month decrease in defects detected by NHBC in stage inspections;
- an increased ability to attract and retain skilled workers, with improved standards of health and safety competence evident right through the supply chain;
- the highest percentage of its workforce achieving CSCS certificates within the Kier Residential group of companies.