

Heyrod Construction Ltd

Worker engagement case study 9

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.

The challenge

In 2005, Heyrod directors became concerned about rising accident rates. Investigation into the causes of this trend, and what could be done to reverse it, resulted in an accident reduction strategy, with a commitment to increase the personal responsibility of the workforce towards health and safety, and to fight what was then seen as complacency.

Frank Gillespie, Managing Director, says: 'We want to be known as the safest employer in our sector. We were concerned that once the company grew to employ more than 500 workers, our accident rates went up, and we had to attend more meetings with principal contractors expressing concern over our performance. The safest sites are the most productive, we needed to drive home the message that there are no shortcuts to safe, productive work; each worker needs to understand this, and look after their own health and safety.'

The Heyrod safety team started using Total Quality Management and Investors in People principles to design the initiatives, but then found the worker engagement case studies on the HSE website. From September 2005, Heyrod has implemented a range of communication and engagement strategies to drive injury and ill health rates down.

Supervisor training

Supervisors and charge hands are identified by wearing black hats. Over the year from June 2004 to June 2005, more supervisors were appointed, bringing the ratio of supervisors to operatives down from 1:9.3 to 1:8.7. From September 2005 to March 2006, there has been a considerable investment in supervisor training. As of March 2006, 60 Heyrod supervisors have attended the two-day CITB supervisors' training course. A key part of this training is to develop communications skills. Over the same one-year period, the number of full-time safety advisors has increased from one to four.

Company fact file

Heyrod Construction Ltd is a family business, based in Chadderton, Lancashire for the past 25 years. Operating in the north of England, mainly along the M62 corridor, the company has an annual turnover of around £50 million, and specialises in constructing all types of concrete structures. For most contracts, Heyrod is a specialist subcontractor, providing services such as building false work and formwork, specialist scaffolding, pouring and finishing concrete and operating associated plant. Builds include bridgeworks, highway structures, sewage works, pumping stations and multi-storey concrete frames etc.

Recent contracts include Princes Dock, Liverpool, St James Hospital, Leeds, and the Manchester Joint Hospitals Project. Clients have included Bovis, Carillion, Alfred McAlpine and Amec. Heyrod has now diversified into new build, refurbishment, and design and build projects.

Heyrod employs some 700 workers directly, with typically up to 100 additional European workers.

Communications

Morning prayers

The 'Black Hats' meet with their gang of operatives each morning to deliver a daily briefing, covering current and planned work activities for the day, health and safety issues, hot topics and any company messages in health and safety bulletins. This briefing is known as 'morning prayers'.

Regular briefings and trade representatives

Heyrod site managers brief supervisors on the work programme, health and safety issues and feedback from health and safety advisers each week. They also meet trade representatives on a quarterly basis. Currently, Heyrod has one formally appointed safety representative, undergoing training through the TUC.

Engagement mechanisms – The hot topics

The accident reduction analysis identified four hot topics to engage with the workforce to drive down accidents:

- respect for people;
- housekeeping;
- pedestrian walkways; and
- planning the site.

A zero tolerance approach has been developed, with managers demonstrating that resources will be devoted to

improving standards. Toolbox talks are held to illustrate good practice, with pictures of good housekeeping, pedestrian walkways and well-planned sites. All Heyrod workers should receive a weekly toolbox talk. Attendance records are kept.

Innovation – Improving safety on site

Suggestions from the workforce can improve safe conditions on site. At the Manchester Joint Hospitals site, workers identified podium steps as being the most stable and productive method of working at height to fix and take down purpose-built shuttering columns used in the new structure (Figure 1). In another example, the Alsipercha inertia reel system has been adopted to provide a fall-arrest facility for workers unloading steel from delivery lorries (Figure 2).



Figure 1 Podium steps in use



Figure 2 A Jennings and J Keeley with the inertia reel system

Directors' tours

Early 2006, directors Jim Ness and Paul Gillespie visited all ten Heyrod sites between them, and spoke to every operative. By getting out on site, they were setting an example in the personal protective equipment (PPE) worn, and in their conversations with individual workers. Their simple message is 'Look after yourself, don't take shortcuts.'

Health and safety bulletins

Regular bulletins cover a wide range of topics: lessons learned from incidents on site, the results of the company Health and Safety Policy review and the launch of the confidential 141 Hotline to head office to report health and safety concerns. A recent bulletin covered the outcomes of employee consultation and announced trials of better quality wet gear – in response to concerns raised by workers.

Product evaluation

Evaluating products such as gloves and other items of necessary PPE is used as opportunity to engage with the workforce and seek their views through a questionnaire.

Health screening

A network of managers and first aiders is being established to set up an initial health screening process. The aim is that every worker is asked relevant questions to assess whether they are suffering from work-related ill health conditions such as hearing loss, hand-arm vibration syndrome or dermatitis. This is a first line of identification of problems, where any workers showing signs of these conditions will be referred to health professionals for a full assessment.

Foreign workers

Heyrod employs up to 100 workers (mainly from Poland and Portugal) for whom English is not their first language. The company has developed a range of strategies, including making sure that there is an interpreter available for a gang of six foreign workers. Method statements are interpreted into Polish and Portuguese, and toolbox talks are given in the mother tongue. Specific health and safety training is provided, including the CITB CS Health and Safety Test. Heyrod's accident analysis indicates that these workers, approximately 17% of the workforce, contribute only 4% of all first aid and injury accidents reported to supervisors.

Results

Safety Manager Mike Routledge is seeing the results of the new approach after a first year of operation:

- a 50% reduction in accidents;
- indication of reduced staff turnover and retention/return of skilled staff;
- increasing levels of trust from the workforce;
- willingness to try new work methods and make suggestions;
- improved health and safety competence;
- the previous blame culture is dissipating, with more openness and a willingness to talk;
- better management understanding of accidents, eg from recent accidents, 50% resulted in a hospital visit, 60% involved workers who had worked for Heyrod less than 12 months, 70% occurred before 11.00 am;
- reduced adverse client or principal contractor feedback - 'Contractor of the Month' award at St James Hospital, Leeds site.

'When we say safety is as important as production we mean it and we must demonstrate it at all times. We are pleased with these early results but they are just a foundation on which to build upon.' Paul Gillespie, Director.