

Rok Building

The Southampton Job Centre Plus contract

Worker engagement case study 11

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

Directors of Rok Building recognised the need to perform to exemplary health and safety standards on this project, the largest of the fit out contracts. The works involve stripping out existing internal fabric, fixtures and fittings and assisting in the decanting of staff around the various floors while the works continue. The seven-storey building remains an operational social security and government office, so issues of access, noise and disturbance to live operational areas have to be properly controlled. A particular issue is to keep parts of the building available for access to the general public.

Apart from security and access, health and safety concerns are the logistics of receiving lorries and unloading goods at the site, storage and delivery of materials to each floor, controlling slips and trips, working at height and out-of-hours working.

The response

Planning

Project Manager John Clarke pays tribute to the scope which the partnership contract allowed for himself and his management team to plan the detailed layout of the site, and to implement the procedures to ensure that the workforce fully engaged with the site health and safety system from day one. A road closure was obtained to enable a one-way system for deliveries from lorries, and to facilitate security of the site. Particular attention was paid to the quality of the welfare facilities, and the use of the canteen as a central information centre for the site, with over 35 free leaflets on display, covering everything from binge drinking to the latest safety initiatives.



Figure 1 Road closure - good planning creates the conditions for effective worker engagement

Project fact file

Rok Building is part of Rok plc, with a turnover of £600 million and 2250 employees. From a base in the south-west, Rok Building has grown steadily in the last five years to develop a national presence.

The Job Centre Plus in Southampton is the largest single refurbishment contract in the 1100 or so job centres being refurbished by the Department for Work and Pensions. These contracts are all let on a partnership agreement, in which Rok Building are appointed as regional works contractor for Hampshire.

The contract is a £3.2 million fit out and new extension project scheduled to last 47 weeks.

Rok Building operates by engaging established subcontractors to carry out the building work, putting in about 10 000 man-hours every month.

Induction

All workers on the DWP contract have to attend a full day's safety training, leading to the award of a safety passport for DWP Job Centre Plus sites. This means that site induction can focus on the site-specific information needed by the workforce.

Site Manager Ian McKenzie, who is the health and safety co-ordinator for the site, uses the induction session as an opportunity to do more than just broadcast information. He aims to draw workers into conversation, asking questions such as: 'What was health and safety like on your last site?' and 'Can you tell me anything I can learn from?' Ian comments: 'These conversations provide an initial opportunity for real consultation, to get a feel for individuals' knowledge and attitude to health and safety'.



Figure 2 Site Manager Ian McKenzie carrying out an induction briefing

Communications

A range of methods are used to communicate to the workforce on a regular basis, and to check that certain messages are understood.

Hazard board – A large weatherproof white board is fixed outside the main site office, where workers sign in each day. The site manager regularly updates this board with information about current/imminent work activities, their key hazards and any preventive and protective control measures required. Any ‘one-offs’ or anything unusual happening on site that may cause a hazard is also highlighted.



Figure 3 Hazard board

Information points on each floor – A large board is situated on each floor, which duplicates the information needed by the workforce. This includes a box containing the current risk assessments and method statements for the work activities currently underway. If a worker needs to refer to a method statement, he hasn't got very far to go. Another opportunity has been seized by placing information such as the HSE High 5 information leaflet on display in the smoking area.

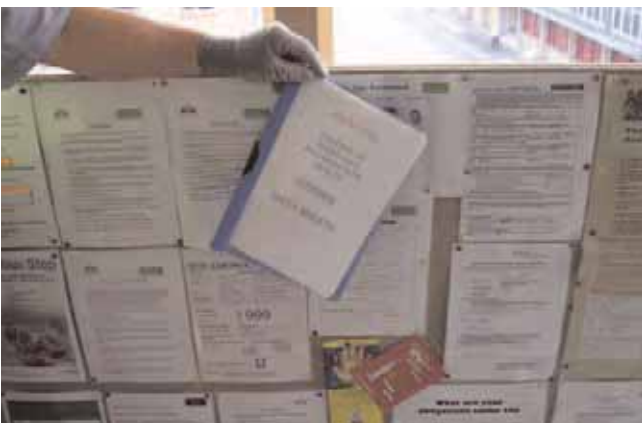


Figure 4 Information points are placed on each floor

Targeted toolbox talks – These are delivered weekly, but not to everyone on site. The aim is to target those involved in higher risk activities. Typically these involve showing a DVD or bringing in a manufacturer's representative to deliver the talk.

Working Well Together roadshow – In common with other DWP sites in Hampshire, the Southampton site has hosted its own roadshow, bringing in a range of manufacturers and service providers to demonstrate best practice. The highlight of the Southampton roadshow for many was the practical demonstration of a face fit test for disposable mask users.



Figure 5 Working Well Together roadshow

Checking and challenging

The Rok ethos is to maintain focus on practical and people-centred actions. The site management team spends time each day walking the site, talking to workers and welcoming challenges to the work methods adopted. A recent example of this approach in action involved a problem raised by electricians who wanted to wear shorts in the very hot weather. Discussion around this led to the adoption of a common sense approach, where trades agreed to an extra vigilant local risk assessment to remove relevant hazards, in return for the right to wear shorts.

Cultivating a positive work atmosphere

Project Manager John Clarke says: ‘I see my job in part as breaking down the ‘us and them’ barriers between managers and workers. I need to be approachable, so they feel able to challenge me, and I can encourage them to contribute to and take ownership of the health and safety systems on site. One of the hardest things for any site manager to cope with is working in an antagonistic atmosphere, and I am proud that that is not the case here.’

Results

- A positive working atmosphere, summed up by a worker as ‘good welfare, good safety standards and good working conditions.’
- The project attracts a stable and skilled workforce.
- The project is on programme after 20 weeks of work, with two cuts to fingers requiring first aid only, as the only incidents or accidents.
- The project has contributed to the outstanding achievement across the DWP Job Centre Plus Project of over 1.6 million man-hours worked without a RIDDOR reportable incident.
- There has not been one single formal dispute on completion of any JCP contract.

Shaun Davis, Health and Safety Director for Rok, sums it up like this:

‘By being inclusive rather than exclusive, by being proactive rather than reactive, by being practical rather than theoretical, Rok are nurturing a positive safety culture throughout the workforce that is the pre-requisite of a safe, healthy and efficient company.’