

# Vange Scaffolding and Engineering Co Ltd

## Worker engagement case study 1

*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.*

### Introduction

This case study focuses on Vange Scaffolding and Engineering Co Ltd, and the company's work for its main client, BP Coryton.

'Scaffolding is high-risk activity carried out in an extremely hazardous industrial environment, and as such, requires a health and safety management system which is easily understood by management, supervision and operatives. The need for safety awareness, safe working and best practice must be driven by the directors. We encourage two-way communication and a commitment to health and safety throughout the company. The board of directors has developed a culture that results in proactive initiatives from all company employees. This is recognised by clients and employees alike, and has meant the Vange safety culture has assisted in the Company's success and safety record.'

*Mr Kelvin Short, Managing Director, Vange Scaffolding*

### The challenge

At peak times, the company needs to employ many travelling scaffolders to supplement its core workforce. These workers need to be integrated into the existing team, while maintaining consistently high standards of health and safety performance in a high-risk environment. The company recognised some years ago that this would not be achieved by simply providing workers with personal protective equipment (PPE), but by making safety part of the company culture, instilling it right from the top.

### Engaging the workforce

Vange Scaffolding has introduced the following work procedures as part of the company's commitment to health and safety:

- At BP Coryton, new starters and returning contract scaffolders all have to undergo a comprehensive

### Company fact file

Founded 1956, in Vange, Essex, Vange Scaffolding and Engineering Co Ltd provides mechanical scaffolding services to petrochemical installations, power station construction, and major civil engineering projects.

The company typically employs around 120 scaffolders on a range of sites. Scaffolders normally work in teams of three, headed up by a qualified advanced scaffolder.

All scaffolders are directly employed, and most are members of a trade union. All new starters are classed as trainees until proof of their training and qualifications is obtained. Trainees are put through an intensive in-house training scheme.

A typical job would be to provide access scaffold to enable maintenance or asbestos removal from plant or pipe work on a refinery or power station. This could be a simple tower platform or a complex multi-lift designed scaffold.

Vange Scaffolding has provided over 25 years of contract scaffold services to their main client, BP Oil's Coryton refinery. Numbers rise at shutdown times, but around 70 scaffolders are employed on this contract alone.

As well as BP, Vange Scaffolding has worked for over 30 major clients, applying the same procedures and policies at each site.



Figure 1 A scaffolder completes a workforce awareness checklist

induction, lasting up to a full morning. Employees are briefed on a range of essential documentation and left in no doubt as to what is expected of them. New and inexperienced workers are buddied up in work gangs with men who know the site.



Figure 2 Folding trailer step



Figure 3 Coloured hats identify different grades of workers

- At induction, all workers are provided with a pocket card illustrating good scaffolding practise from BS 5973 and the National Access and Scaffolding Confederation (NASC) guidance note SG4:00 The Use of Fall Arrest Equipment whilst Erecting, Altering and Dismantling Scaffolding.
- A 'PASTA' card, or workforce awareness checklist, is completed and signed by all gang members on each shift before starting work. This acts as a prompt, to ensure unforeseen hazards are identified and discussed before starting work. This checklist is a pocket-sized card, retained for checking by a supervisor.
- BP Coryton has a 'hazard hotline' for workers to report problems on site. Vange Scaffolders also use a hazard reporting form to report any hazards they spot on site, such as loose fences and insecure ladders. Vange Scaffolders report about ten such hazards a week. All workers are encouraged to identify hazards on the refinery, not just matters specific to their own trade. BP offers a simple reward scheme to provide an incentive to contractors to participate.
- 'Toolbox talks' are held at least weekly, often focusing on topics raised by Target, BP Corytons newsletter that reviews incidents reported to the safety committee.
- BP Coryton holds a weekly Incident Review Meeting, at which all contracts managers are present, and a safety committee of contractors' representatives meets monthly with a representative attending the main refinery committee. Vange Scaffolding has three trained and active safety representatives on the BP site.

### Safety improvements

'As a shop floor safety rep I feel fortunate that Vange management listens to our concerns. We have a voice and through joint discussion our concerns are acted upon. If we can prevent things going wrong we know it benefits the company and ourselves.'

*Vange Scaffolding safety representative, Danny Kelly*

Three examples are given of how workers' suggestions have improved safety at BP Coryton:

- 1 As a result of the Vange Scaffolding's open door policy, workers spoke to managers about the difficulties of offloading scaffold boards and components from the trailers used to move components around the refinery. After trialling various options, a folding step was introduced on the front of the trailer, to provide access at the right height. This improvement has now been made to 20 of the company's trailers.
- 2 The Scafftag system of scaffold labelling was already in use. Workers suggested the addition of an orange 'off hire' tag to the system, to clarify which scaffolds were out of use and ready for dismantling.
- 3 Different coloured hard hats were introduced, to identify grades of workers - orange for trainees, red for safety representatives and white for qualified scaffolders. On further request, these hats are now issued in a reduced peak style, to improve visibility.

### The benefits of a safety culture

- 1 The rate of RIDDOR reportable accidents and injuries is one third of that of the construction industry as a whole, with no fatal or major injuries reported at all in the last ten years.
- 2 Trained employees stay with the company. Apart from the travelling community, staff turnover is low.
- 3 Vange Scaffolding is able to secure and retain long-term contracts with major clients, who recognise the importance of proactive safety management.
- 4 Vange Scaffolding has secured excellent risk ratings from their public and employers liability insurers, leading to continued cover at a competitive rate.