

Sharing is caring for north east partnership

Having witnessed a horrific and fatal accident during the early years of his career, Alan Bassett discovered he had a real passion for health and safety. Now chair of NESHEP – North East Safety, Health and Environment Partnership – he talks about the work of the organisation and what it is striving to achieve.

Joanna Gurman

NESHEP is a self funded membership organisation currently representing around 80 contracting companies in the north east of England. These companies range from SME organisations to national and international companies, employing more than 20,000 people.

NESHEP's main aim is the continuous improvement of all aspects of SHE including promotion and maintenance of excellence in safety, health and environmental management and performance throughout the member organisations and their workforce. Sharing and learning is high on the agenda and is encouraged at every opportunity within the partnership.

The partnership devises training and education programmes for the joint workforce, to promote safe working and engender changes in behaviour and attitude towards safety, health and the environment.

INFLUENCE: Alan Bassett, chair of NESHEP.



The NESHEP philosophy is based on “competitors in business but partners in safety”, thereby encouraging a learning and sharing culture amongst its members.

Members receive updates and training by way of bi-monthly meetings, presentations, lectures and correspondence including access to the website and groups on social networking site LinkedIn.

The Teesside SHE Partnership (TSHEP) was formed in 1999. A number of contractors who were part of the “ICI SHE Challenge 2000” initiative, that ended with the demise of ICI's presence on Teesside, decided to continue the good work in promoting SHE initiatives across their various workforces.

Approximately six years on, the much expanded organisation decided to align the work of the TSHEP to that of NEPIC (North East Process Industry Cluster) and this resulted in a name change to the North East SHE Partnership (NESHEP).

Sharing ideas and solutions

NESHEP is endorsed by various client organisations, as well as being affiliated to, or co-operating with RoSPA, IOSH, the British Safety Council, Safety Groups UK, Teesside Safety Group and the “Working Well Together” campaign spearheaded by the HSE.

As part of its function the partnership has a number of sub-groups which cover:

- Sharing and best practice
- Training and development
- Membership
- Environment
- Health
- Measurement
- Excellence
- New technologies
- Promotion and publicity

For each sub-group there is a chairperson and they all meet at the partnership steering group every other month, along with enthusiastic members and associates, to agree new initiatives and the way forward. The organisation also responds to questions and concerns raised from its annual questionnaire, and these are discussed at the meetings.

There have been a number of initiatives to come from the steering group including an auditing toolkit for use by members to audit each other's businesses. This has been very successful and is another example of sharing solutions.

Alan joined NESHEP in 2003 and has been chair for almost four years. He says: “I joined the partnership because I was keen to see what problems the industry faced first hand and I wanted to share my thoughts and ideas on how things could be improved.”

And this, says Alan, is the key to the partnership. “Without the function of sharing ideas and solutions, everybody would just be re-inventing the wheel over and over, making the same mistakes time and again, which is all too common across industry. It has been great



to see the sharing of policies, procedures and best practice by large organisations to the SMEs because they do not have the same resources and networking opportunities.”

He adds there are many challenges facing industry in the north east, particularly in light of the economic downturn, and it is times like these when the partnership’s policies and procedures are put to the test. Alan explains: “Being a part of NESHEP is invaluable in overcoming issues. It is a pleasure to work alongside so many dedicated and enthusiastic professionals, each of whom is aligned with our common goal of improving the

and produce something that was fit for purpose, all of which have been achieved, says Alan.

The EMSS is an online database system that eliminates the need for complicated paper trails and costly administration. Users upload their key industry training to their profile, which can then be instantly and securely shared with their employer and any site they may attend.

Client sites can instantly audit individuals for their safety passport and key industry competencies live on the website (www.emssonline.org). They can

SHARING SOLUTIONS: The steering group meets on a bi-monthly basis.

complained about having to put their workers through multiple passport schemes to access various sites across the UK. This training was essentially the same in all cases and was a huge waste of resource “that needed stopping in its tracks”.

Alan says: “The EMSS scheme has transformed the way in which individuals, contractors, clients and the HSE share vital information on the safety and competency of individuals working in heavy industry.”

Benefits of the scheme

Tightening up of controls on personal safety competence and providing an easily accessible audit tool are the principal benefits of the scheme, according to Alan. “It also provides an excellent facility during accident investigation and reduces the administrative burden dramatically across all industry sectors and the millions of man hours wasted on duplicated training courses which can now be put to better use on more specific focused training and induction,” he adds.

The EMSS scheme has been well received by members since its implementation and the organisation is yet to receive any negative feedback about the initiative. “Everybody I talk to is keen to get behind the scheme as soon as they see the benefits,” says Alan.

“Having an EMSS card guarantees a minimum standard of health and safety knowledge and that the qualification has been validated with the issuing body. So, not only should individuals work more safely now, but they know that everybody around them should be working safely as well.”

The courses included in the EMSS scheme have primarily been driven by NESHEP’s

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health, safety and environmental culture of our region.

“The success of the partnership is attained through co-operation, mutual respect and the learning and sharing of best practice. The wealth of experience, expertise and dedication of our member companies helps sustain continued improvement.”

Providing a standard

One of the main successes has been the EMSS (Essential Minimum Safety Standard) scheme that the partnership has implemented in consultation with the industry, client groups and contractor support organisations. It ran numerous workshops to develop the format

also receive an email containing a link to a user’s profile before they even arrive on site.

This new system will allow the employer/manager to invite people to join their network allowing them to review their competency in one location. The employer/manager can also upload training courses and supporting evidence to multiple profiles and instantly share their industry relevant competencies with client sites they may visit.

Meanwhile, workers can prove they have the necessary competencies without the need to carry paper copies of their training records with them.

According to Alan, the EMSS scheme came about after many of the NESHEP members



“As a company servicing the needs of many of the major oil, petrochemical and steel companies, including Conoco Phillips, Lucite International and TaTa steel, we are constantly seeking methods of improving our safety standards. “We firmly believe that the EMSS scheme fulfils that and are pleased to endorse this safety initiative.”

N.Agar, health and safety manager (C.I.S. Northern)

members to ensure that competent people are not undergoing courses that are beneath their existing qualifications. The EMSS recognises other higher qualifications which are all carefully mapped against a minimum standard and were gleaned from HSE guidance on passport schemes INDG 381.

A safe and sustainable future

Audited and approved schemes included in the EMSS are CCNSG, the National Safety Passport, SPA, VCA (European passport), IOSH managing safely and the NEBOSH general certificate. The British Safety Council’s level 2 award in supervising staff safely and the level 3 certificate in occupational safety and health have also been approved by the scheme.

NESHEP has been associate members of the British Safety Council for a number of years and many companies in the north east are members of both organisations. One such company is Spie WHS, which was awarded its 40th consecutive International Safety Award from the British Safety Council this year.

“The British Safety Council has been around for many years and it is acknowledged as one of the leaders in the field of health and safety,” says Alan. “When it was brought to my attention that Spie WHS had achieved this accolade, I contacted the British Safety Council to see how it could work more closely with NESHEP so our members could benefit from the British Safety Council’s services too.”

Martin Hood, health and safety manager at Spie WHS, says: “We have been involved with the North East SHE Partnership since its inception in the late 1990s. We find the partnership and its work an extremely valuable tool in order for us to keep up-to-date with current issues and in sharing and developing best practice within our industry.

“The strap line of ‘competitors in business but partners in safety’ is now even more evident with the new EMSS scheme. It’s a powerful tool that enables each company to keep training records current and evaluated

against a set of minimum criteria. It also enables the competency of individuals to be demonstrated to clients easily who can then log onto the system without the hardship of having to print off reams of certificates. The system will prove especially valuable when workers move from company to company as the records are instantly transferable.”

British Safety Council chief executive Julie Nerney comments: “The EMSS provides an effective system for recording health and safety competence and the British Safety Council fully supports this scheme.”

As a self-funded organisation, NESHEP relies on word of mouth along with the support of organisations such as the British Safety Council and the HSE to promote the work that it does. However, the EMSS scheme has been very successful so far and Alan hopes this success will only grow. “I think this blip in the economy has brought out the true

British grit and determination in all of us to make a difference and ensure we forge ahead to provide a safe and sustainable future for our children.

“When EMSS becomes ‘the scheme of choice’ – and I have no doubts that it will – I would like to see a centre of excellence developed in the north east to support all industry sectors in the region and beyond. It’s an ambitious plan but the support from the partnership and the surrounding industry will prevail, I’m sure. I would also like to see more support for apprenticeships and provide up-to-date resources and training to stimulate the next generation moving forward.”

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PASSPORT TO SUCCESS: The EMSS scheme has been well received in the north east as a way of securely sharing industry training and competencies.