

CEMEX UK - case study

‘Safety is the first item on the agenda of every meeting we have’



Safety is an integral part of the culture at building material supplier, CEMEX UK. We spoke to Julie Welch, Health and Safety Manager for logistics, and Paul Clarke, Logistics Fleet Engineering Manager, to find out more.

“I think we’re fortunate here,” says Julie, explaining how the safety programme has the full support of the CEMEX management. “Our president gave a speech to staff last week and his main point was that one tonne of cement isn’t worth risking someone’s life over. He was really passionate about it, so it’s great we have that kind of reinforcement from the top.”

“We’ve got an initiative we call ‘visible-felt leadership,’” she continues. “Each month, everyone from our president in the UK, vice president, directors, down to logistics managers are tasked to go out on at least four visits around the country. They observe the drivers going about their duties and, if they spot any unsafe behaviour, they’ll have a chat with the driver there and then to agree a safer practice and get the commitment from the driver.”



Two-way communication The visits present a great opportunity for dialogue, according to Paul. “Safety is the first item on the agenda of every meeting we have,” he reveals. “It doesn’t matter if it’s the UK board, or whether it’s my engineers’ meeting. But, as well as allowing us to check safety policies are being followed, our visits also mean we can spend 10 or 15 minutes with the guys so they can see safety is a priority right to the top of the organisation.

“You get a good exchange of views,” Paul says, adding that anyone in the organisation can feed suggestions into a ‘good ideas bank’ for management to consider. “Our drivers are told they have the right to refuse delivery if they think a site’s unsafe so, if time allows, I might go along with them for a delivery and see any issues for myself.

“There was a problem with artic manoeuvrability at one particular site,” he recalls. “I went off with the driver one day and what they’d been telling me was absolutely right so, following a few simple changes on-site, we’ve made it easier and safer for everyone involved.”

A safety culture

Julie describes how the introduction of a one day workshop for drivers was instrumental in changing attitudes to safety. “The fact was that the accidents we were experiencing were largely as a result of driver behaviour so, around five years ago, we took the drivers off the road to encourage them to stop and think. We talked through previous accidents and how things could have been done better.

“We saw improvements pretty quickly just by talking to drivers about their performance,” she says. “Since then, we’ve built on the results and seemed to have really changed the culture. “I hope I’m not tempting fate, but we’re just about to celebrate four years without any accidents involving individuals in the south west region, and a lot of the drivers have said that safety workshop was one of the best things they’ve ever been on.”

Side scan success

CEMEX has introduced driver aids to its fleet, including reversing cameras and side scan proximity technology to alert drivers to cyclists and pedestrians on their near side.

The side scan system works in a similar way as reversing sensors in cars. “There are sensors placed along the near-side of the vehicle, usually over the wheel arches,” Paul explains. “When you engage your left indicator, an audible warning is broadcast to let people know the vehicle is turning. The sensors also switch on and detect the proximity of objects, whether it’s cyclists or pedestrians moving towards you.

“The driver has an in-cab display to indicate how close the object is, and they’ll also hear a beep. If the vehicle gets closer to the object, the display lights up and the beeps become louder and more continuous.”

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Julie also explains how some initial teething problems with the reversing cameras helped with the training of drivers when side scan was introduced. “When we first added reversing cameras in 2003, we saw an increase in reversing accidents because drivers were relying on the display and not using their mirrors as much,” she admits. “So we learnt big lessons from that.

“We now continuously remind drivers that these things are aids and they shouldn’t just rely on them. We also do a lot of work to explain why we’re adding things, whether it’s to improve cyclist safety with the side scan, or another area. Our London drivers have particularly welcomed the side scan and, overall, it’s really effective.”

“Interestingly, while he finds it helpful, one driver said to me that nothing replaces your mirrors and these,” Paul adds, pointing to his eyes.

“We’re absolutely clear that the technology is an additional aid to help the drivers and other people on the roads. It’s part of our whole safety ethos and I think the drivers appreciate that.”