

– COORS BREWERS LTD – MANAGING HEALTH & SAFETY LRQA CASE STUDY

The food and drink sector is one of the most regulated in the UK which is reflected in the numerous food safety standards and schemes the industry must or chooses to comply with. This article takes a brief look at the rationale behind one brewery's decision to adopt the occupational health and safety technical specification, OHSAS 18001 to help in managing its health and safety.

Background

The Coors brewery in Alton, Hampshire operates a management system which is certified to ISO 14001, ISO 9001:2000 and the BRC Technical Standard; is compliant with FEMAS and HACCP and will shortly need to adhere to the forthcoming IPPC Regulations.

“We soon began to realize that adopting OHSAS 18001 was the best route for us to help us drive further improvement in health and safety throughout the site.”

Roy Andrews Health and Safety Adviser Coors Brewers Alton Brewery

Despite the multiplicity of standards and schemes that the Alton site was already working to, early in 2003. The Alton management team, including the health and safety advisor at the site, Roy Andrews identified the need to work towards implementing a formal occupational health and safety (OHS) management system.

Alton had become conscious that the existing environmental and quality management systems were increasingly being used to manage health and safety activity. Adopting OHSAS 18001 as the vehicle to manage health and safety activity would help to give a clear focus on key objectives and measures, help demonstrate top management commitment and so raise the profile of this critical function.

Robert Parker (Quality Improvement Manager) approached LRQA during the implementation stages for a gap analysis visit to help identify areas for improvement within the management system prior to the formal certification visit.

The Alton Brewery gained certification to OHSAS 18001 in July 2004 with LRQA.



Implementing OHSAS

“We strive to add value and improve performance through everything that we do here at Alton. Health and Safety shouldn’t be treated any differently in this respect.”

As health and safety adviser, Roy together with Robert Parker was responsible for implementing the OHS management system. They followed a logical implementation project plan which started by getting hold of a copy of the standard in order to check the key requirements and what was needed to achieve certification. A series of internal audits were then carried out site-wide to verify what elements of the system were already in place and also to identify any ‘gaps’ in the system and areas needing improvement.

The company already had well established risk assessment processes and procedures in place. This included having automatic detection levels for CO₂ – a natural by-product of the fermentation process in addition to procedures for all the typical risks you would find in the majority of food processing and industrial sites – COSHH, manual handling, slips, trips and falls.

“We already had a good management structure in place – but we recognized that a systematic structure was required to both guide and encompass the various initiatives,” explained Roy. “As a site, we already had a strong health and safety culture - rather than an enforcement environment - so the foundation elements of an OHS system were already in place making the job much easier.”

Once the basics of the OHS system were in place, LRQA were called in to undertake a formal gap analysis visit. “This was extremely useful in making sure we focused our resources on those areas needing most attention. We found in particular that the visit proved useful in helping us focus on the legislation relevant to our business.”

Working with LRQA

“Our assessor was highly knowledgeable and helpful during both the gap analysis visit and the final audit. Without her support and advice, it is doubtful we would have had a strong enough system in place to achieve certification.”

LRQA and Coors have had a long-standing relationship going back to 1993 when the organization was owned by Bass Brewers. During this time, LRQA have certified the Tadcaster, Burton and Alton sites to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and the BRC Food Global Standard and seen the organization through the transition to the revised year 2000 QMS standard while also helping in reaching a number of milestones in its management systems.

One such milestone was in working with the Alton Brewery to gain certification to OHSAS 18001 - the first of the three Coors breweries in the UK to do so.



Roy needed to be sure that Alton gained value from the external certification visit. “We found our assessor very observant, good at pointing us in the right direction and identifying areas that required our attention. We took the advice and recommendations given in the final report from the gap analysis visit and acted upon them. This helped ensure our system was in good shape for the formal visit,” he commented.

“We enjoyed a good relationship with our assessor and found her a good auditor with sound communication skills. In my mind, she was partially responsible for us being able to achieve what we did.”

Benefits

“We have below average accident statistics both for the industry and for the company as a whole. This isn’t down to good luck but to the development of a good safety culture which has been enhanced by having a robust system in place understood and adhered to by all those on site.”

Many organizations find that the regular surveillance visits where the LRQA assessor comes on site to audit the system provides a focus to help the company ensure it adheres to the policy and meets the objectives it has set.

“Having achieved certification to OHSAS 18001, we want to be sure we maintain it and this in itself is a key spur to us remaining focused. The regular surveillance visits that LRQA carry out will provide both the opportunity to discuss new ideas and initiatives we may have for progressing the system while also providing the ‘enforcement’ to keep us on track.

“The very fact that it is a management system means we also have - and importantly are seen to have - commitment from top management and a strong structure in place. This is a key point to communicate to staff throughout the site and was stressed during the annual business presentation in January of this year. The fact that we were able to present to the whole workforce during a management overview helped put health and safety management on everybody’s agenda.

“Importantly, OHSAS certification has given health and safety a higher profile at the Alton site with the knock-on benefits that all employees have a greater sense of shared ‘ownership’ and responsibility for the safety of themselves and their colleagues,” concluded Roy.

Having only just achieved certification to the standard, it is still early days to be reviewing correlation between the implementation of the system and impact on safety statistics – particularly as the Alton site had lower than average incident levels.



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Key facts

Coors Brewers Limited is part of the Coors Brewing Company, the UK's second largest brewer with a 20% market share and the world's 8th largest brewer. The UK company which comprises three breweries and two malting was acquired by Coors in February 2002 and with its head office in Burton-on-Trent in Staffordshire. Brands include Carling, the UK's biggest seller, Grolsch, Worthington's and Coors Fine Light Beer, an American style lager launched in late 2003.

The Alton Brewery was built in 1963 originally for Harp Lager and has been owned by a number of the large breweries prior to the Coors group. Over 1.1 million barrels are produced at the brewery each year and 129 people are employed on-site in the processing and packaging of keg and bulk beer.

To learn more about LRQA products and services, contact our business advisors on [281-646-6390](tel:281-646-6390).

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