

## Introduction

Adding value to a product involves making it more desirable and better for the final consumer. Ways of adding value to a product or service include improved design and functionality. For many products one of the most important ways of adding value is through health and safety (H&S). This is particularly true in the construction industry where customers, employees and the wider public expect buildings to be safe as well as attractive.

*Portakabin* is part of the Shepherd Group. This is a family company which preserves all the benefits of family values. These benefits include caring for employees, valuing the communities to which it supplies modular buildings, as well as the local community in York where the company is based. The *Portakabin* brand is the most widely recognised brand in modular construction in the UK. *Portakabin* modular buildings provide high quality working environments for many other businesses and organisations, for example, office buildings and schools through to hospitals and hospitality suites.



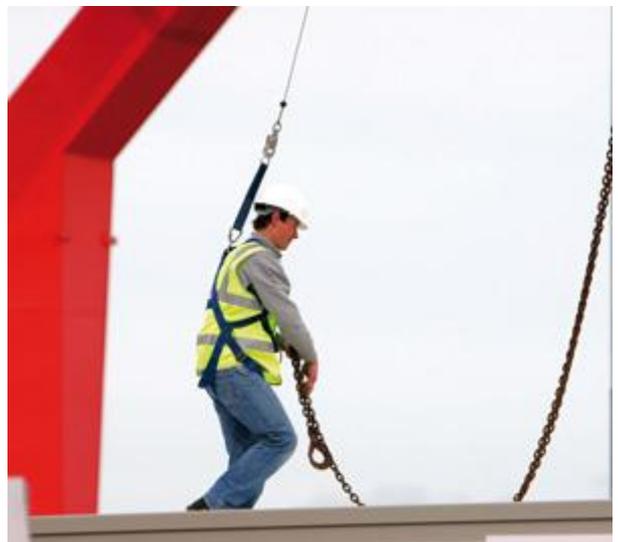
Health and safety policies form a key component of the *Portakabin* Corporate Social Responsibility document and are an integral part of the business where it is actively promoted through a diverse working culture. *Portakabin* not only constructs and sells new modular buildings but also hires out buildings, for example, when a school needs interim accommodation quickly. Therefore, health and safety is a key consideration in each of these situations, especially in relation to a safe environment for children to work and play in throughout the school day.

## The advantages of modular buildings

Modular building is at least 37.7% safer than traditional construction methods. Modular buildings are produced in a factory and then assembled at the construction site. The materials are relatively safe to transport. They can be assembled quickly using standard procedures and checks, reducing risk at every stage of the process. For example, there are 90% fewer vehicle movements to site in modular construction when compared with traditional construction methods.

The overall responsibility for health and safety in a company rests with the Board of Directors. They ensure that effective H&S policies and practices are in place in the company and that they demonstrate a commitment to health and safety being promoted. However, health and safety is the responsibility of everyone who works for a company. Training is vital to ensure that everyone understands what is expected of them.

Often the importance of health and safety and how it is achieved can be overlooked when analysing business practices. This case study explains in detail how *Portakabin* implements health and safety policy and highlights the benefits this brings to the business.



## The importance of health and safety at work

Focusing on health and safety protects employees in every activity that they carry out. Health and safety also protects customers, the wider public as well as contractors working for a company.

Operating primarily in the European market, *Portakabin* needs to take account of both UK and European Union health and safety legislation. The construction industry has its own additional regulations covering aspects of design and management and safe working practices.

As the leading supplier of modular buildings in the UK, *Portakabin* has set itself the goal of being the best company in its industry in relation to health and safety. This includes setting standards for contractors (e.g. transport companies and suppliers of components). *Portakabin* takes its duty of care to employees, customers and visitors very seriously. Strict health and safety policies are in place at all company sites. Proven safety procedures, such as safe driving guidelines, are used when working on customer sites. These are issued to all employees to create benefits all round.



*Portakabin* has recently achieved OHSAS 18001 certification at its York manufacturing site. This is the internationally recognised British Standard for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems. To achieve the certificate *Portakabin* was required to demonstrate that it complied with a specific set of criteria and standards.

## Health and safety legislation

Companies have overall responsibility for the health and safety of their employees and others. The responsibility of the company relates to creating and implementing the overall framework, e.g. the policies, procedures and training which create a good health and safety culture. However, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employees also have responsibilities. Employees' responsibilities include:

- to take reasonable care of their own health and safety
- to take reasonable care not to put other people – fellow employees and members of the public – at risk by what they do or do not do in the course of their work
- to co-operate with their employer, making sure they understand and follow the company's health and safety policies.

## Safety management system

To carry out risk management effectively a company needs to have an overall safety management system. *Portakabin* has a safety management system that includes the following elements:

- a general statement of intent (commitment to health and safety)
- identification of who is responsible for H&S
- reporting structure (what H&S reports will be produced, by whom and for whom)
- arrangements for H&S (the actual details of H&S practice)
- identification of legal requirements and how these are being met
- objectives and targets (setting the internal standards to be achieved)
- monitoring and measuring (e.g. recording incidents to check objectives are met)
- periodic review for continual improvement (e.g. recording accidents/incidents to check incidents are closed).



## H&S responsibilities

One of the most important parts of the safety management system at *Portakabin* is the identification of where responsibility for H&S lies. *Portakabin* has put in place comprehensive documentation that clearly shows what employees are responsible for:

- Taking care of their own health and safety and that of fellow employees.
- Understanding the health and safety policy and carrying out their work safely.

- Ensuring that all protective equipment is properly used and looked after.
- Reporting any accidents/incidents or near-misses which might lead to injury.
- Using the correct tools and equipment in line with training and instructions.
- Co-operating with any investigation designed to improve health and safety.
- Setting a personal example when visiting the workplace or sites by abiding by local rules and wearing appropriate protective equipment.
- Promoting the company's commitment to H&S at all levels.
- Knowing emergency procedures at the location where working.

## Training

Appropriate training is given depending on the individual person's role. For example, a director will have training in legal duties and responsibilities; an operative will have training specific to the role, such as manual handling training. *Portakabin* employs full-time H&S professionals who are qualified at degree or diploma level specifically in health and safety.



## Implementing health and safety



Implementation means putting something into practice. *Portakabin* has a commitment to health and safety which goes beyond simply meeting minimal legal requirements. This is demonstrated through the achievement of OHSAS 18001, where the key aspects are covered.

### **a. Risk policy**

An effective policy should provide clear outlines of where a company and its people stand in relation to a policy area. It should be widely communicated and understood by all.

It starts out with a 'statement of intent'. This sets out that *Portakabin* aims to achieve 'the prevention of injury and ill health and the promotion of the health and well-being of all employees'. Other aspects of the policy are:

- To achieve continuous improvement of standards by annually reviewing policies, procedures and safe systems of working and setting clear objectives and targets.
- For all employees to take ownership of health and safety. This should be their first consideration in everything they do.
- Having an 'open door' policy to reporting health and safety issues and concerns.
- Encouraging reporting of accident, incident and near-misses.

### **b. Risk identification**

Companies assess all health and safety risks which are documented as part of a wider risk register. Safety procedures are then put in place to reduce or limit these risks. The risk register and safety procedures are continually updated.

### **c. Training**

H&S training for new employees is initially carried out during an induction programme. This covers all company procedures that directly affect the new employee and establishes a strong health and safety awareness. Existing employees regularly receive update training. This includes training where:

- there are modifications to new or existing machinery and equipment
- an employee changes job role or position
- people are working with hazardous substances. This is referred to as COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) training.

Employees also receive training in handling materials and equipment (set out in Manual Handling Regulations).

#### **d. Measuring and monitoring**

*Portakabin* regularly carries out checks to make sure that its health and safety practice is continually improving. It has a number of measures in place to record its health and safety performance. These include the analysis of accident reports. The company has an 'aim for zero' approach to accidents.

Another key indicator is the number of working days lost. Figures for accidents and working days lost due to accidents are constantly monitored. This makes sure that the company is alert to negative trends and patterns. These are immediately investigated.



#### **Business benefits of health and safety focus**

Careful attention to health and safety adds value to a company and its products. Having a strong health and safety record enhances brand image. It also means that the company is able to deliver the right products at the right time with the minimum of delay and safely. This is vital in the highly competitive construction industry. The overall impact of these benefits is to make *Portakabin* a supplier of choice because it provides the company with a competitive edge over rivals.

*Portakabin* customers include businesses, health authorities and schools. They seek to work with suppliers who have the same concerns for health and safety as they do. *Portakabin* has therefore been able to build very strong relationships with regular customers. The esteem in which the company is held by customers impacts positively on employee motivation. For the company the strong health and safety record substantially reduces downtime (i.e. time lost to inactivity) and associated costs and creates a safe culture.



#### **Reducing loss**

Accidents caused by injury at work potentially create substantial losses to a business and are de-motivating to the workforce.

In the UK, injuries that cause an employee to be away from work for more than seven days must be reported online to the Health and Safety Executive (a government H&S body) within 15 days. This requirement is set out under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR). The accident/incident rate for *Portakabin* under RIDDOR is 37.7% less than the average in the construction industry.

*Portakabin* demonstrates its commitment to improving health and safety in its recently launched 'Aim for Zero' campaign. This focuses on the behaviours required to achieve zero incidents and accidents.

#### **Conclusion**

Health and safety delivers many business benefits to *Portakabin*. As a family company the heart of the *Portakabin* business lies in a motivated group of employees working together to build strong communities.

A focus on H&S by the company and its employees demonstrates a shared commitment to each other. This positively affects relationships with customers and other stakeholders.

The central aim of a commercial business is to produce valued products at a profit. *Portakabin* is able to concentrate on producing its high quality modular buildings, knowing that it has effective risk management in place. A strong focus on health and safety not only enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty but also strengthens the image of the brand.

