

Safety First

The importance of safety is at an all time high, as these winners at the Vehicles and Plant Awards show

Never has safety been more important in the waste and resource management industry, and nowhere is it considered more vital than in the vehicle and plant sector. It was therefore a pleasure to see that at the recent Vehicles and Plant Awards ceremony a category devoted to “best commitment to health and safety” practices (sponsored by Faun), while several other winners demonstrated excellent safety procedures in categories such as “developments in new technology” (sponsored by Allison Transmission) and “fleet manager of the year”. *CIWM* was at the awards and spoke to three of the winners.

Fleet services manager, William Whyte, end of life vehicle dismantling operation, Albert Looms, and the company behind the electric bin-lift, Ecoprocess, have two things in common: they are all Vehicles and Plant Awards winners, but they also all have an unerring dedication to improving health and safety.

It says a lot that non-health and safety specific awards (fleet manager of the year and developments in new technology) still had a strong H&S element to them, but having spoken to all three winners, it is easy to see



Albert Looms' extensive site has worked tirelessly to meet stringent safety standards

that the judges were swayed by their dedication to improving safety levels in their products and their business. As Scott Young, UK sales manager at Ecoprocess said: “It’s a potentially lethal industry and dreadfully unsafe... Our vision is to promote health and safety. It’s no longer good enough to turn a blind eye.” The consistent message from all quarters is that to really make a difference a culture change needs to happen: within

a company one person can take the lead, but the entire workforce needs to “get on board”; within the industry several companies can lead by example or introduce products to make a difference, but the rest of the industry must follow suit and pay attention to the products that can make a difference. Just as you are “only as good as your weakest link”, you are also “only as safe as your most dangerous practice”.



Ben Wood
Editor



The Ecoprocess Isbjörn bin-lift: safer and quieter

Ecoprocess UK, a company borne out of Iceland, was rewarded for its Isbjörn electric bin-lift, which can be used as either a single or a double lift (it has recently introduced the Thorbjörn single comb bin-lift for trade waste operations). The product's key point is safety, but it also boasts that it can save 15-20 percent in fuel consumption and operates at just 45 decibels, well below the levels of a standard bin-lift.

The bin-lift itself is not hydraulically powered and, therefore, when it returns to ground level having deposited its load, it uses gravity and not hydraulics, meaning the vehicle's engine is not bearing the workload. Fitted with sensors, the lift will also detect whether a worker is in the path of the lift. Unlike hydraulic lifts that can continue on their downward path, whatever stands in their way, the Isbjörn will stop immediately upon contact. "There is no use of uncontrolled power on the way down," Scott Young explained, "and the low noise levels means that if there were any incident, the person involved would be able to alert their co-workers easily."

With fewer moving parts, there is not only less maintenance required with the lift, but also less danger for the workers. Additionally, the lift is protected by a strong, but flexible, enclosure and automatic overload sensors prevent

overweight bins from being lifted.

With greater fuel savings and less maintenance, the idea is that the lift can spend more time working. Its quiet operation allows it to start work earlier in the morning, disturbing fewer people, and a quieter, safer environment for the operatives reduces their fatigue too.

"There is nothing revolutionary about the bin-lifts," Young explained, "It is just a good idea, utilising technology that already existed. With health and safety now you have to be pro-active and people are becoming aware of that and, with this product, I think

we're winning the market over."

When the end of life vehicle regulations came into force a few years ago, the team at vehicle dismantler **Albert Looms** had a big decision to make: continue and conform or call it a day. It chose the former and has achieved conformity in some style.

The company's prime move was to appoint two members of its 19-strong staff as health and safety officers – not many companies can lay claim to the fact that around 10 percent of its workforce hold such positions – as well as appointing a health and safety consultant. Financial director, Dawn Allen, said: "We worked very hard to drag the business into the 21st century."

The company completed risk assessments, staff training and ran awareness campaigns for its employees, while the fact that the public are also on site was a further challenge. "We had to make sure the public knew the site wasn't a playground," Allen said, "and anyone under 17, the legal driving age, is no longer allowed in."

As already mentioned, culture change is the key to successful implementation of new working practices, and getting the workforce on-board was one of Albert Looms' biggest challenges. "They had to get used to many new ideas," Allen explained, "but we are now finding that they are keeping an eye on the public and are making our visitors abide by the new rules." ➔



The new rules regarding health and safety are clear for all to see at Albert Looms

VEHICLES

The judges decided that the company had “gone the extra mile” in its commitment to health and safety, which seems a likely reference to the installation of new equipment to meet the regulations and the fact that it has found new ways to constantly remind its workforce of their new obligations. “One of our health and safety officers, Sally Allen, created some characters which were put onto posters as a way to get the message across,” Allen explained, “it’s a simple but effective method” and it seems to have worked.”

The other health and safety officer, Raymond Kirk, added: “Not complying was not an option and the money we have spent is certainly better value than reacting to an incident. All the staff are aware and I’m delighted at how well the messages have been taken on board.

“The new fire regulations are the next challenge, but we’ve been preparing for that; we’re aware of the way safety trends are going and we’re on the ball. It pays to be ahead of the game.”

“Councils are changing; they’re no longer organisations, they’re businesses,” explained fleet services manager at Angus Council, **William Whyte**, “and we’re at the forefront of that change.”

Whyte, and Angus, has certainly embraced change in his three-and-a-half years in the job. He came from a public service background and has brought that safety conscious



William Whyte in the refurbished workshop at Angus Council

attitude into this new role. One of Whyte’s remits was to improve vehicle maintenance standards, but he also has control of vehicles on the council’s landfill site and in its recycling centre. To do that he has focused on improving training and introducing an employee development programme. “In the first year I ran 30 training sessions for the workshop staff, including courses on MOT inspection. We basically re-wrote the process for vehicle maintenance and training and have focused on giving the team the right tools for the job.”

The workforce at Angus Council has benefited from an increased knowledge of the maintenance process and, with more workers able to identify and rectify faults during the

council’s pre-MOT inspections, the fleet itself has managed to achieve a first-time MOT pass rate in excess of 90 percent. “Achieving such a rate is a personal standard,” he explained, “but it should also be an industry standard.” Whyte also implemented a new maintenance system that sees every vehicle

in the fleet being inspected every six weeks. “More often than not the team tell me that there was nothing wrong with the vehicle and nothing to note, and that’s the way it should be.” He added.

New training programmes, new maintenance schedules and all new processes across the fleet management board have undoubtedly led to this award, but a completely refurbished workshop, as well as an updated and age profile reduced fleet, are just further examples of Whyte’s commitment – and the council already holds the title of “local authority fleet operator of the year”.

Despite the great strides and achieving a “cultural change” within the council’s operations, Whyte still strives for more when it comes to health and safety: “Health and safety is never perfect, it’s an ongoing issue,” he explained, “but at least we’re no longer just waiting for an accident to happen.”

One of Whyte’s philosophies is that a happy driver is a good driver, and good drivers are inevitably safer. Therefore, before any purchases are made, the council trials all vehicles and bases its decisions on driver feedback. He also believes that awareness is the key, along with applying the facts and figures to preventative maintenance. “We have to change the image of how to do this job,” he concluded, “and we’ve got to make it more attractive to get the best.” **CIWM**



The electric-powered, non-hydraulic, Isbjörn bin-lift in action