

Inspection carried out by Jonathan Vigour, Cert NEBOSH

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Date of review 09 / 05 / 2012

Introduction including overview of area inspected and activities taking place**Inspection Location, Acme Construction, Anytown, England****Date of Inspection – 9th May 2012**

The inspection was carried out at a construction site operated by Acme Construction, a large construction company/managing agent who are part of the Acme Group. They are undertaking a refurbishment project to a large four storey Victorian building that has had a number of previous uses but is now being redesigned as a hospital for the private sector.

The site consists of the main building with a courtyard area at its centre and a comparatively small yard and welfare/office area adjacent to its north facing elevation. The east and south facing elevations both adjoin public footpaths and minor highways. The yard is a busy area, in that it is used to receive deliveries, accommodate waste bins and skips, and to store plant and machinery. Two construction workers are employed in this area, one of whom is the gate man and the other the hoist operator (the hoist is fitted to the north elevation of the building and sits in the yard at ground level).

The offices are staffed by the Acme project and site management team and there is an office for one of the larger subcontractors on site. There is also a toilet block, drying room and canteen facility for use by the subcontractors and Acme have a 40 ft metal storage unit on site. At the time of my visit (according to the site signing-in log) there were 90 operatives on the project working for 9 different subcontractors. There are currently a number of activities being carried out including Mechanical and Electrical installation, Steel work, Ground works, Demolition and Drylining, but clearly the nature of the project means that there are ongoing changes in the nature and scope of the works and a high degree of complexity.

Executive Summary

Having completed the inspection and after discussions with the Acme management team it was evident that although there were a number of issues in terms of health and safety, some more significant than others, the issues could all be resolved given time, effort and adequate resource. Doing this would certainly increase compliance with current legislation and crucially, protect the workforce from harm in what is a complex and potentially dangerous work environment. It was also clear that Acme take a conscientious and proactive approach to health and safety matters and are acutely aware of how exposed they might be if they do not work to continuously improve standards with regard to site safety and welfare.

Main findings of the inspection

As a company Acme are performing well despite the slump in the construction sector over the past few years, but in the last year or so they have secured much larger and considerably more complex projects and the infrastructure of the business appears to be struggling to keep up with this level of expansion. As a result it would appear that the management of health and safety has been compromised and my visit has shown that a number of hazards are present and that the management systems in place are not currently robust enough. The main areas of concern are:

1. Traffic Management

As with all construction sites, and more particularly in this case where the site is located in an urban area and has tight access and limited space and is extremely busy in terms of deliveries, it is crucial that site traffic is managed effectively by competent and well trained personnel. The safe movement of materials, operatives and visitors to and from site are key to the success of the project and there are currently a number of concerns in terms of safety.

- a. Firstly, there are no trained banksmen/traffic marshalls on site and that seriously compromises the safety of operatives working in the yard area and members of the public and motorists who pass the site when vehicle/plant movements are taking place.
- b. Secondly, there is no segregation between pedestrians entering the site and vehicles/plant and there is no designated pedestrian walkway from the site entrance to the offices, which could result in collisions and serious injury.
- c. Thirdly, the housekeeping in the yard is very poor with waste materials and plant deposited randomly in the area causing further obstructions and reducing the size of an already small area making traffic movements and vehicle shunts even more hazardous.

- d. And lastly, the fact that plant such as forklift trucks are operating in what is designated a “safe” welfare area because materials have been stored there is of great concern.

There are a number of breaches of legislation with regard to the above including:

The Health and Safety at Work etc, Act 1974 Section 2(2) in that:

Required instruction and training has not been provided in respect of the gateman.

A safe place of work including safe access and egress has not been maintained.

A safe work environment with adequate welfare facilities has been compromised by allowing plant operations in a welfare area.

2. Fire planning & Emergency Procedures

Although there is a fire plan in place it is clearly not being updated in an ever-changing environment. This is indicative of a lack of supervision on the part of management with respect to weekly checks of equipment and daily observations. As the structure changes it is essential to re-site signage and extinguishers, update the fire plan accordingly and ensure safe egress in the event of a fire. The lack of extinguishers in a number of areas and the use of fire exits for site work could result in serious harm or death in the event of a fire together with lost production. As well as breaching some of the acts detailed above it is incumbent upon employers under the ‘Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005’ to put in place procedures to ensure the safety of employees should a fire start.

3. Management of Work at Height

There are numerous issues surrounding the carrying out of work at height and these need to be addressed. It is not enough to simply rely on the local subcontract management to ensure that work at height is being carried out safely. Risk assessments and method statements are provided by subcontractors and once evaluated and approved by the principal contractor (PC) it is essential that adequate supervision by the PC is in place to ensure that only competent, trained personnel are being used to carry out the task and that the equipment being used is fit for purpose and properly maintained and that all work is properly planned and organised. Failure to comply is a breach of ‘The Work at Height Regulations 2005’.

4. General Risk Management

Whilst it is clear that Acme are a successful and generally well-managed company, being ISO rated and a member of the Considerate Contractors Scheme, it is evident that given the scope of the hazards found, the management of health and safety risk at this time is not adequate. The issues detailed above (items 1-3) coupled with concerns such as failure to provide adequate PPE for various construction activities - a breach of the 'Personal Protective Equipment Regulations 1992' - and lack of management control where there is excessive noise and emissions, which breaches both the 'Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005' and the 'Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002', show a lack of determination on the part of management.

Conclusions

As discussed earlier, Acme are clearly a successful business but management of health and safety appears to have deteriorated. The company's awareness and understanding of their duties and responsibilities, though commendable, needs to be translated into action. However, the effort required to rectify matters is minimal when compared to the costs of potential fines, compensation, lost time and productivity, and the adverse publicity that would come as a result of serious accidents and incidents.

The recommendations set out below coupled with robust monitoring systems and a proactive supervisory approach will address the issues in the report and set a benchmark for future performance and continuous improvement, hopefully creating a more positive atmosphere and culture on the site. Although there are costs attached to the recommendations they are relatively small when one looks at the unlimited fines against the company or significant jail sentences awarded to senior managers and directors in court cases involving negligence and poor practice.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Likely resource implications	Priority	Target date
Recognised, certificated training to be provided for site gateman and yard operative(s)	The cost of the course together with temporary replacement for the operatives concerned should be less than £1000	This is a high priority	1 month from date of report
Pedestrian segregation to be put in place using physical barriers, appropriate signage and floor marking	The main costs here will be labour and coupled with the hire or purchase of barriers, and cost of paint and signage should be around £500	This action is a very high priority as it is required for compliance and there is significant risk if not actioned	1 week from date of report
A more effective system for monitoring and supervising activities and a more robust workplace inspection programme required	This may mean having a dedicated CDM/Logistics manager who maintains a constant presence around the workplace and is not office-bound. Inspection registers can be adapted from existing in-house systems and a regime of daily site meetings with subcontract supervisors would be useful. Given the number of site managers the PC has on the project it would be possible to deploy an existing member of staff to the above role so that only the time taken to plan and organise will incur costs	This is a high priority because it is a way to raise standards and then maintain and further develop them. Without this there will be a continued decline	6 weeks from date of report
Push bar panic bolt to be fitted to Acacia Rd fire exit and the practice of using the door for site work and deliveries to cease	The push bar and door closer systems can be purchased for less than £100 and a carpenter could fit them in a couple of hours so total cost would be around £150	Again, this a high priority	2 weeks from date of report
Remaining actions on observation sheets to be actioned	Main cost will be labour	Medium priority	The site would benefit from a follow up inspection in 6 weeks