



Dr Bob Steer - Severn Trent Water

BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY USER CONFERENCE 2003

Hi. My name is Bob Steer and I am operations manager for Severn Trent Water. We are a year into piloting the process on one site.

What I am going to talk about is; a bit about us, so you can put it into context, why we wanted to get involved, what gone well, the challenges we've had and finally, what were going to do next.

A bit about us

We are the sewage treatment group of Severn Trent Water. We're based in Finham near Coventry. We serve 400,000 people, about 120 Mega litres a day. Quite a small team - 6 shift men, 6 day men, 1 assistant manager, a maintenance team, a cat and myself.

What I want to talk about today is how we can really roll this out on a wide scale.

The sorts of issues we face

We have enclosed areas, overhead power lines, underground services, and biogas flammable areas. We create our own biogas with which we use to make power and heat for ourselves, and that creates issues. Moving machinery that moves by itself, slips, trips and falls, plus, and it's a key one this, we are historically a pretty macho industry. We are not as a group of people generally in touch with our feminine side.

Why we wanted to get involved

Basically what happened was that we had, not a very serious accident, but a reportable accident. Somebody injured there hand, and it really highlighted to me we have some cultural issues, just in terms of getting the job done. As a rule of thumb, the first priority has always been task related, and it's difficult to try and unlock that. After that we spoke to an occupational psychologist, and they suggested talking to Ryder Marsh and getting a proper programme.

What we did

We asked for some volunteers from operations and maintenance and attended a 3-day course, which was great. We got 8 volunteers from that, who then formed a committee. We then realised that some of the interface issues would be quite difficult, observing behaviours was a new thing for us. So we decided to tackle housekeeping first. Its visible, it's less controversial and it doesn't get in peoples faces too much. Then we tackled personal protective equipment next, so this was a first sortie into how people's behaviour affected their work.

What we did was to split the site into zones to do measures on.

What's gone well?

Lots I reckon. We have had a core of people involved who have been really up for it, which is great from my perspective. Housekeeping has improved greatly, and the site is now of a standard where people are looking out for one another and know they won't make a mess. One of the main benefits is the spin-off benefits, because I think its true to say, we now have a group of people who think differently to how they thought before, because they have been equipped with some tools, some causality things, and that transfers into everything they do.

Problem solving and process issues... Rather than go straight to the management they tend to look at things for themselves, which is fantastic.

And we have got over the hurdle of observing people. The committee were dead nervous about going out with a clipboard and saying to someone &I am just about to observe how you behave". We did get a lot of help from Ryder Marsh in terms of communication, but it's still a bit of a worry.

And the culture has started to shift, definitely.

And another good thing, well is it's a bit of a double-edged sword I suppose, is that the directors are interested in what were doing. The guys normally do all there presentations to the directors. The directors are really up for this and the presentation skills the guys are learning are substantial, and I can see some of them being pinched off for other roles.

Examples of things achieved

We didn't have any walkways; we were lucky to have paths in some places. So walkways were a key issue we have addressed.

We have improved signage and a 1-way system now.

One of the problems on the site was the storage was very haphazard, but we have many more designated areas now.

We have lots of ideas coming, both safety and none safety, from the work force.

We've got a safety video now, which is good.

So far we have had nobody refuse to be observed - which is a really good thing!

If you look at this graph, you can see we had a bit of a dip in our housekeeping when we started, and this is due to a capital scheme on site. This data meant it was really easy to go to the contractor and smack him round the head with it, and say, "our programme is suffering because of your inability to control your guys around the site". At the moment we're at around 85, and we have set our target at around 85, so that's gone alright.

What has been challenging?

Some of those not involved, mainly safety reps, some of who had achieved nothing on that side for nearly 15 years, suddenly these new people come along, it was viewed like a secret society because we all went away to do a course and came back wiser people. Some people would look for ways to trip us up, saying, "what gives you the right? You're not a safety expert". But the good thing was that the measures were so black and white, and uncontroversial that we just hit them back with that.

And now?

We have increased participation of the general workforce outside the committee, and that's gone well. Probably out of the dozen people there were 6 really up for it, 4 that didn't really mind and a couple who were actively against it. I would say the balance has shifted now. The 2 who were actively against it were less bothered than they were. We decided it's quite a strategy not to waste too much time on them, otherwise you end up getting wrapped up and devoting too much time to their issues with the system.

The increased influence of the committee is notable. The power base has changed and is now surrounding a bit more around the committee.

I felt the need to report some accident data. We've had no accidents this year but that is against one accident last year, so I think we have to wait a bit longer for significant accident data.

Questions

"Have you found any problems or thought that you have rushed things and has that created any problems?"

Its like anything, you come up with a new system and you want to get it moving. I had problems with some of the pace of things at times, personally I would have liked it to go faster but that's nature. I don't think we've rushed things overly, and we have deliberately held off on doing the behavioural observations on people, despite me saying &come on, we've got to get going" the committee said &no, its not ready for it yet". I think we've had fairly big discussions and we've been pretty ok about not rushing it through. It doesn't feel rushed.

"Did you find that as people looked at high risk issues like housekeeping, did you find people were being more and more successful at looking at 'at risk' behaviours, that people, for example, would put themselves in the line of fire unwittingly, during an observation, and then that being pointed out as a safety behaviour, then you notice those behaviours changing and seeing less and less of that?"

To be honest, at the minute, in terms of the &measurables" of the behavioural stuff, other than the E.P.E. things, we're not a long way down the program to understanding that lot. It's fair to say that all of us are, you'll notice on site, people are behaving safer, and anecdotally. And moreover the committee don't want the cave dwellers to come up and say, &Look at what your doing, so everybody is a bit like "well, I am going to be safe". We've got no real data, but generally you can just see it around the place, people are safer.

"It's a difficult thing to put a performance measure on"

Well, yeah... but I am definitely going to walk down the stairs now though. (IE Leave the stage!)