

Case Study for Implementation of a Health Surveillance Programme for Alstom Transport UK and Ireland

Background:

Alstom Transport employs some 2000 people in the UK and Ireland at over 20 locations. They have full service provision contracts with several train operating companies, including the Alstom designed and built Pendolino fleet for Virgin Trains. They also built much of the current fleet of metro trains running on the London Underground, and today provides maintenance for the Jubilee and Northern line fleets

Occupational Health Provision:

Until September 2011, OH services were contracted out to an external OH provider. Without in-house expertise managing and overseeing this contract, only a very basic level of service was requested, which predominantly involved statutory periodic medicals and D&A testing

Over the past 18 months, Alstom Ltd OH has been carrying out a gap analysis within Transport to help identify services which needed to be developed to benefit not only the employee but the businesses involved. The ultimate aim was to have an integrated OH service across all sectors of Alstom UK, providing a fair and equal service to all and helping to promote and maintain the physical and psychosocial health of individuals

In September 2011 Alstom Transport moved over to the Alstom Ltd OH service, who works in partnership with an external provider to carry out remote site work.

- All core activities are maintained by the relatively small in-house team, consisting of 5 OH Advisers, supported by 2 part-time OH Physicians. The in-house team is split geographically and provides a service including management referrals, return to work rehabilitation assessments, advice on workplace adjustments/restrictions in line with the Equality Act 2010, ill-health retirement, health promotion and employee wellbeing programmes
- The UK wide external provider is contracted to carry out all statutory fitness for work medicals and health surveillance across Alstom's remote Power and Transport sites. All records are held by Alstom Ltd OH to enable follow-up, reporting, trend analysis and audit

Statutory Health Surveillance:

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW) states that employers have a general duty of care to ensure, (as far as is reasonably practicable) the health, safety and welfare of all their employees. Health Surveillance is about having procedures in place to detect work-related ill health at an early stage and acting on the results (HSE 2005). As such, health surveillance is not an end in itself but shows whether control measures to reduce and avoid workplace health hazards are working.

The gap analysis highlighted that whilst Alstom Transport employees were being assessed for their fitness for work in line with Network Rail and London Underground Standards, there was no identification of the potential health effects resulting from hazard exposures within the workplace. Discussions with the Health and Safety community confirmed that 'safety' was a top priority, with some excellent systems in place but 'health' hadn't really been addressed- it was an area that was not only putting employees at potential risk but also the Company in terms of insurance claims. Alstom Ltd OH, with the support of the Transport Senior Management Team set an objective for the business to transfer their OH provision to the in-house/mixed service provision by the end of 2011, with a Health Surveillance programme being high on the list of priorities. A cost-benefit analysis and key KPI's supported the transition

Points to consider

- Where an employee's continued fitness for work may be affected by the outcome of HS, an agreed policy on possible redeployment needed to be in place
- Informed consent to participate in any HS programme would need to be sought from the employee by means of the post offer health questionnaire
- The consequences of refusal to participate in HS where this is legally required for work with an agent/process needed to be made explicit

Setting up the programme:

- Health and Safety carried out a risk assessment to identify the potential hazards within the workplace. The risk assessment needed to be carried out properly to show where there is a significant residual risk to health even after reasonably practicable control measures have been applied.
- A hazard matrix was developed to identify exposures against trade, enabling Alstom OH Ltd to advise on the level and type of health surveillance required. Unfortunately resources were not available to carry out detailed exposure monitoring at this stage. It was decided therefore to take the highest risk factor and apply this to all trades for the initial roll-out. Inevitably this meant that some employees would receive a level of surveillance over and above what was required but this was deemed to be favourable over providing inadequate levels of surveillance
- The tender process for the external OH provision contract had to take the specific requirements of Alstom Transport into consideration. The service needed to be UK wide and potentially 24/7. To maximise efficiency and ensure minimal disruption to business continuity, the assessments would need to be carried out in bulk at each Transport site
- Effective communication with key stakeholders was crucial. Alstom Ltd OH visited site and met with Operational, HR, and Union representatives. An employee factsheet and toolbox talk was developed to assist in the communication
- Several planning meetings were set up between Alstom Ltd OH and the external provider to develop a 3 year scheduled programme. A dedicated Alstom business support coordinator was identified to be the direct link between the external provider, Transport site and Alstom Ltd OH, but in the main the external provider would liaise directly with a nominated site contact to arrange the assessments

Progress to date:

Contact has been made with each site and the site visits are beginning to be scheduled in. It is anticipated that it will take approximately 3-6 months to target all employees (bearing in mind that Santia are also providing the service for Alstom Power)

Scheduling updates and progress reports will be issued to the designated Alstom/Santia business support coordinator

Reporting on Results:

The external provider will issue a Health Surveillance Report for each site visited to Alstom Ltd OH. Data reported on will include:

1. Total number of employees seen
2. Total number of Audiometry/Respiratory/Skin/HAVS assessments
 - Breakdown of results based on HSE categorisation and guidelines and
 - Number of employees referred for further investigation
 - Number of employees requiring follow up
 - Fitness to continue working with specific hazards
3. A 'red flag' system will highlight to Alstom Ltd OH any significant issues which may require urgent attention
4. Alstom OH Ltd will report back to the appropriate business representatives on any issues. This will enable them to assess whether the current control measures in place are effective in reducing the health risks as far as is reasonably practicable

Summary:

Whilst Alstom Transport recognised that this was an essential service requirement, progress was relatively slow in obtaining the necessary information and eventual go-ahead. As with any new project, finance was a major consideration and it was important that an accurate business case was put to the senior management team, highlighting the long-term cost benefits of implementing an appropriate HS programme. This focussed predominantly on potential litigation costs and loss of productivity as a result of work-related ill-health. I would strongly recommend that exposure monitoring be carried out before any HS programme is implemented to help avoid unnecessary costs. With hind-sight Alstom Transport accept that this should have been carried out prior to completing the risk assessments and hazard matrices

Claire Sallis RGN, RM, PostGradDip.Occ Health
UK Occupational Health and Wellbeing Manager
Alstom Ltd