

Analysis



Sector 16 – safer ways to work

A top scoring speed camera, in terms of prosecutions, has been found to be one that sat for a period of 18 months photographing motorists speeding through roadworks on the M62. Not a glorious accolade but it is very important to note an endemic problem and ways to tackle it. People are driving too fast through roadworks and putting road maintenance workers at great risk.

Health and safety is an issue that should never be forgotten, particularly so for the highway maintenance sector. Managers and directors with direct responsibility for H&S systems and strategies will want to point out that the best safety records are always at risk. Ever awareness is imperative and acutely so among the cones of a resurfacing or major maintenance contract, where danger always lurks.

So what can be done? Many organisations are pushing forward with safety awareness campaigns, including the Highways Term Maintenance Association (see opposite). Plus there are several well known means of reducing risks to maintenance crews by creating physical barriers between vehicles and active work areas. These can only be used where there is room and time to place them.

A big message from the Highways Agency and other major organisations is ‘train your workforce and back this up with an accredited Quality Management (QM) system’. Sector 16 accreditation is what they are talking about. It is stipulated in the

Specification for Highways Works, and it is the QM scheme for laying asphalt backed by CSS, UKAS, the certification companies and training bodies.

Sector 16 has been mandatory for work on HA roads and motorways for about a year now, and the main focus now is on assessing how well it has been taken up by contractors and made mandatory by other authorities. Plus, the committee of experts behind Sector 16 is keen to gather more feedback.

“Most people feel that Sector 16 accreditation is a good thing. Perhaps it could be more robust and rigorous, but it will evolve over time and for this we need more views and experience from accreditation groups,” says the HA’s quality assurance manager Lance Williams. “A registration scheme is being developed to provide reports on how many companies are accredited.”

Williams chairs the Sector 16 committee and is its representative to the National Highway Sector Schemes Liaison Group which oversees all of the various UKAS sector schemes. These have been developed between the highways industry and its client bodies and organisations to bring some conformity and consistency to QM in the roads sector.

Early QM systems appeared in the 1980s and the then Department of Transport included approval schemes for these in the Specification for Highway Works. According to Lance Williams, the number of systems and certification groups increased to the

point where in the early 1990s, some schemes were not being updated to include developing best practice because of a lack of overall management.

Williams was appointed by the newly formed Highways Agency to establish a measure of control over all this. He took up management of the relevant SHW Clauses 104, 105 and appendices listing the QM schemes.

“We started developing bench marks and set up committees with the CSS, UKAS, certification bodies, relevant trade associations and training bodies, because training was not universal either,” Williams says. All of the QM systems of each sector of the Highways industry were brought under National Sector Scheme Advisory Committees and these report to the umbrella liaison group to make sure all QM schemes are directed into a common format and accredited fairly.

“The QPA (Quarry Products Association) has been looking at acceptance and use of Sector 16. Accreditation is a mandatory requirement for HA work and we look forward to the roads authorities of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales doing the same when it is appropriate for them and all local authorities need to follow best practice,” says Williams.

“The HA, Major Contractors Group and construction client bodies have policies of employing a skilled workforce for improving health and safety. Sector Schemes actively encourage this.”