

A disciplined

In this article, Chris Blyth, public relations officer, LRQA UK, examines the role that OHSAS 18001 is playing in the health and safety strategy of leading power generation construction company, ABB ALSTOM in Newcastle, UK, and the importance of management systems to the continued success of the company.

A specialist in turnkey project management and supply of equipment and services to the UK power industry, ABB ALSTOM is justly proud of its progress. From its humble beginnings with just five employees in 1990, the company has grown rapidly to over 110 employees and a turnover in excess of £200 million at its current, purpose built site.

Bob Hill, managing director of ABB ALSTOM in Newcastle, explains:

“Management systems have been a key element in the continued success and growth of the company. From day one, this company has realised the absolute importance of management systems within all aspects of business activities. History has recorded many examples of companies that have expanded exponentially and then failed because they haven't had the necessary infrastructure. Controlled growth really is the key to success and the enablers for controlled growth have been our systems, procedures, disciplines and ultimately, the professional culture that they create collectively.”

ABB ALSTOM achieved ISO 9001 in 1992, just two years after the establishment of the company, and four years later was approved to ISO 14001. In October 1999, LRQA completed the external audit of the company and recommended approval to the dual standards of OHSAS 18001 and LRQA's proprietary health and safety scheme, SMS 8800. This means ABB ALSTOM will be one of the first companies anywhere in the world to gain certification in both standards. The company is currently integrating its systems and is on schedule to achieve complete

integration of all three management systems, including one-stop third party auditing by mid 2001.

LRQA has been instrumental in the development of the new OHSAS 18001 specification and had been running a pilot programme, SMS 8800, for approximately 15 months prior to the announcement of the introduction of OHSAS. The similarity of the two schemes has meant that companies already seeking SMS 8800 could readily integrate with the additional requirements of OHSAS 18001 and become certified to a dual standard.

For ABB ALSTOM, external assessment by LRQA is extremely important as David Harwood, corporate manager for quality, health safety & environment, explains:

“Wherever you go in the world, the name Lloyd's Register carries weight. Certification to OHSAS 18001 by LRQA will be a very visible way of validating our health and safety credentials. We do not see LRQA as simply our certification body, we believe that our relationship is a collaboration which aids our development in these very important strategic and people management issues.

“We see health and safety as one of the cornerstones of our business. What greater step can we take for health and safety than have a management system established that will add value to our company for many years to come. This will also help us influence and encourage our suppliers – many of which are smaller companies – to embrace the ethos of management systems.”

The company prides itself on some of

the lowest accident frequency rates in the construction industry. In the history of the company, only one employee has ever suffered a lost-time accident in the course of their duties. The company feels it has a high responsibility to its contractors and sees benefits in measuring and assessing their accident rates when being employed throughout ABB ALSTOM project sites in the UK and abroad – and therefore counts employee and contractors within its accident statistics.

In 1998, there were four lost-time accidents and in the previous year there were none at all. But why adopt a health and safety management system when accident rates are so low? David Harwood explains:

“If we have allowed one person to be hurt, that is one too many. I believe that good management can, if not completely eradicate accidents, minimise them to such an extent that no-one need suffer time loss injury and possible lost income due to accidents at work. This is why we continually strive towards a zero accident rate. We do not believe that it is inevitable that accidents will happen in the construction industry, that attitude is for the domain of companies with inappropriate accident frequency rates. We can actually see the light of success at the end of the accident free tunnel. It requires a great deal of effort and enthusiasm, but it is achievable.”

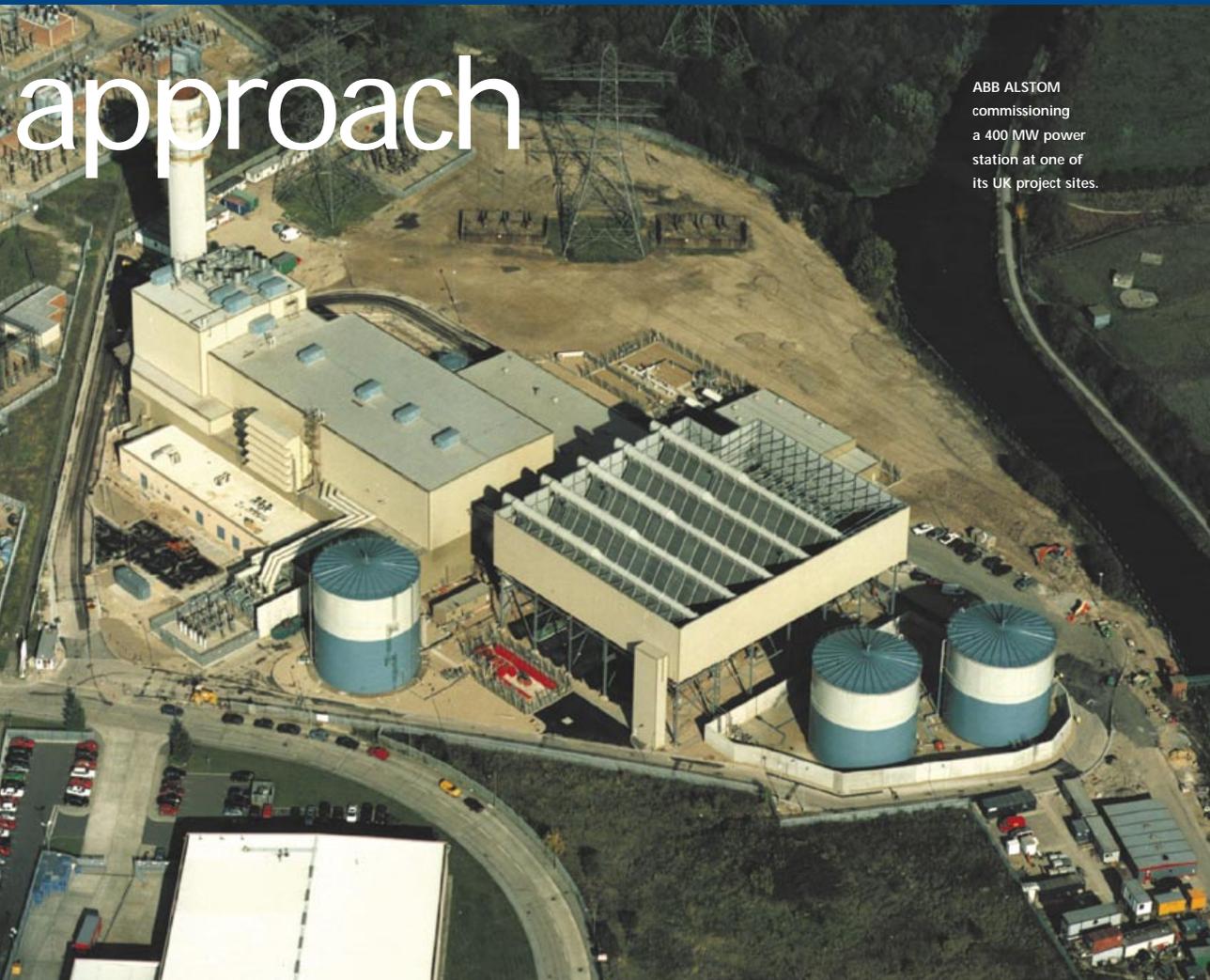
“Moving forward is integral to the way in which the company operates its business. Indeed, the whole concept of continual improvement sits well with the way the company feels about its operations,” observes Bob Hill. In line with this philosophy, and as part of the evolution of its management systems, ABB ALSTOM has recently automated its document management processes. New bespoke configured software was commissioned earlier this year.

Q-SET, a specialist in multi-site installations, was selected to provide a fully integrated multi-site, multi-standard system to support the requirements of ABB ALSTOM operations.



approach

ABB ALSTOM
commissioning
a 400 MW power
station at one of
its UK project sites.



The project was started in March and rolled out in April – just three months before the company's triennial audit of its ISO 14001 system. This was to be the first time the new software system was to be used.

Three LRQA EMS auditors were involved in conducting the ISO 14001 assessment in Newcastle and two other locations: Environmental Systems in Staines and Flow Systems in Telford. The assessors were able to conduct the document review from Newcastle and from computer terminals at the other locations using the company's Lotus Domino/Notes network. The outcome was successful with Flow Systems added to the scope.

The Q-SET software used allows for faster and more responsive communications between Newcastle and its sites and has helped engender a greater shared ownership of the management system as David explains:

"The system being distributed by a software package, has allowed far better communication. The servers 'talk' every 20

minutes which means the person you send documents to can respond almost immediately, in addition, changes can be made and re-sent very quickly. This gives us the opportunity for our personnel to review and accept revisions to procedures and authorisation to be gained within a very short space of time.

"Everyone feels that they are part of the process and the team. This creates a culture where people take personal ownership and responsibility for seeing tasks safely through to completion. The bottom line is that the company continually improves and evolves and all employees are playing a crucial part in this process."

The new system not only facilitates communication and provides a flexible method of working, it is a step closer towards the implementation of a paperless office. The quality, environmental and health and safety management systems have already been transferred to Q-SET. However, hard copies are still available at each site and are located in an 'information point' which is controlled by an

employee who is on-line and responsible for keeping the procedures up-to-date. This ensures that new contractors coming on site have access to the systems.

The reputation that the company has gained in the marketplace as an ethical and caring organisation to employees, trading partners and customers is important, David expands:

"We believe we have improved market share because our clients recognise that the way we do business is compatible with the way they want to see it done. Our clients expect to see a project which results in deliverables complying to specification at an agreed price. They also want plant which has been constructed, commissioned and delivered safely and with good environmental probity, a plant which they can operate safely and efficiently. We believe that we deliver such a package."