



## **Managing health and safety in road haulage**

### **Gwynedd Shipping Group**

Gwynedd Shipping is a large freight logistics company based in Holyhead, Wales and a leading provider of door-to-door transport services between the UK and Ireland, utilising a fleet of 650 trailers. It operates in a variety of sectors including aerospace, paper and packaging, foodstuffs, consumer goods, event management, industrial, machinery and metals. It employs a total of 110 staff across six sites in the UK and Ireland, with its main operating centre in Holyhead, Wales.

The company's HGV drivers collect heavy goods trailers from customers' sites across the UK and transport them to and from ports in the north west of England for onward shipping to Ireland. Trailers are either pre-loaded ready for collection upon the driver's arrival, or loaded while the driver waits in a safe refuge area at the customer's site.

As well as employing numerous HGV drivers, the Holyhead site features maintenance garages where trailers are repaired and refurbished by mechanics, and offices where all the shipping and transport operations are overseen.

In May 2011, Gwynedd Shipping Ltd won a distinction in the British Safety Council's International Safety Awards for 2010 – the maximum possible score – for its successful approach to health and safety management at the Holyhead site and the associated road haulage operations.

### **The challenges**

The main hazards the HGV drivers face are falls from height – primarily from climbing onto the back of trailers during sheeting and load securing operations; being struck by moving vehicles in customers' yards; and slips and trips – again, while working on the back of trailers. Additional risks include musculoskeletal disorders; fatigue from long haul driving; and back injuries from jumping down from HGV cabs.

### **The solutions**

To tackle the various risks, Gwynedd Shipping operates a comprehensive health and safety management system based on drawing up effective risk assessments; implementing safe systems of work; regular monitoring and review of policies, procedures and working practices; management leadership; worker involvement; staff training; and setting targets for improvement which are assessed on an annual basis.

Gwynedd Shipping ensure they receive impartial and competent advice by using chartered health and safety advisers from ChemRegs (UK), who have demonstrated they meet minimum standards by being on HSE's approved Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OSHCR).

The health and safety advisers lead the company's management system, but the managers and shopfloor staff - including the group managing director and all drivers – are integral to the whole process.

The health and safety approach generally starts by carrying out risk assessments to identify priorities for eliminating hazards, or, if this proves impossible, to attempt to reduce the risks as far as reasonably practicable. Drivers, office staff, garage staff and the driver safety co-ordinator provide input throughout the risk assessment process and the significant findings are communicated to all employees and other interested parties, such as customers. The risk assessment and resulting safe working procedures are also reviewed annually or when the work activity changes, and in light of any incidents or near misses.

For example, on the road haulage side, the work at height risk assessment led to the development of a safe working hierarchy designed to eliminate or reduce the need for HGV drivers to go onto trailers while sheeting and unsheeting them. The hierarchy runs on a scale from one to 10, and starts by encouraging customers to avoid the need for drivers to climb onto trailers in the first place by providing a safe working gantry or allowing the load to be sheeted from the ground. It runs up to a rating of 10, which allows a driver to refuse to take a trailer if the load is considered unsafe. Gwynedd Shipping has encouraged all of its customers to develop safe sheeting methods and facilities in line with the hierarchy and all drivers are trained to follow it.

Worker involvement and leadership from directors and managers are key to Gwynedd Shipping's health and safety success and there are a number of mechanisms in place for achieving them.

For instance, the health, safety, environmental and quality committee meets monthly and includes representatives from each area of the business, including the group managing director, the transport manager and the HSEQ advisers. The committee considers issues such as the safety performance of the previous month, the outcome of investigations into any incidents or near misses and the corrective actions taken, and employees can feed in and receive feedback on their concerns and suggestions through the various representatives.

A formal incident and near miss reporting system is also in place and all staff are trained and encouraged to report incidents and near misses – for example, HGV drivers can text or send pictures taken at customers' sites to the transport manager.

These measures are backed up with quarterly drivers' safety meetings – or toolbox talks - which conclude with a short written or verbal test to check drivers are up-to-speed on their three key hazards of falls from trailers, contact with moving vehicles and slips and trips.

The company also takes steps to monitor, review and benchmark the effectiveness of its health and safety procedures and performance, including:

- Monthly 'housekeeping' inspections at each of the company's six sites, to check issues such as the physical condition of the workplace, fire precautions, separation of pedestrians from fork-lift trucks and site welfare facilities
- Direct observation of work and behaviour by managers and supervisors to check compliance with safe working procedures
- Carrying out four spot checks per day on the securing of trailer loads (this is one of four specific health and safety targets that are measured annually)
- Sending questionnaires to customers asking for ratings on safe driver behaviour and safe use of equipment by drivers while visiting sites.

## **Outcome**

Although the road haulage industry has a higher rate of accidents to employees than either construction or agriculture - both widely regarded as hazardous industries - Gwynedd Shipping achieved a zero incidence rate of reportable non-fatal injuries for both 2010 and 2011, compared to the 1.5% (1,500 per 100,000 workers) three-year industry average (2008/09) for the transport, storage and communication sector recorded by the Labour Force Survey.

This is an impressive achievement, and indicates there is scope for other road haulage companies to raise their health and safety performance using tried and tested safety management techniques.

Gwynedd Shipping believes that effective management of health and safety can help deliver improved productivity and efficiency, therefore reducing the costs associated with accidents and incidents and sickness absence, and associated lost time. This also increases customer confidence by demonstrating that the business is well managed.