



Working together to improve staff and community safety with BS OHSAS 18001

“Independent assessment and certification to a recognized standard is an important way for us to clearly demonstrate our commitment to the safety of our employees and the wider community. By operating to a structured risk management framework, our service is in a stronger position to minimize the evident risks associated with our activities.”

Iain Low
CFRS Health and Safety Advisor

Customer objectives

- Safeguard staff welfare and operations
- Improved internal organization
- Meet legal and regulatory obligations

Customer benefits

- Improved monitoring, measurement and reporting
- Improved legal and regulatory compliance
- Reduction in accidents and illness

Customer background

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) is responsible for delivering fire and rescue provisions to the 820,000 people of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Service operates from 28 fire stations, which vary in status from being staffed 24/7, 365 days a year, to being completely retained, meaning on-call fire fighters day and night, who are alerted to incidents by a pager.

The Fire Service Headquarters, based in Huntingdon, houses the senior management team, its control room, central operational teams and many of the Service's support staff for frontline activity

There are three main strands to Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue's emergency service role – prevention, protection and response.

Why certification?

Frontline personnel in the UK Fire Service work in extremely dangerous conditions and are exposed to risk on a daily basis. From a fire safety perspective, frontline employees don't always have a full picture of the incident they are attending until they arrive at the scene, making it necessary to carry out dynamic risk assessments. The potential for the severity of danger faced by personnel to change with little notice creates additional challenges. But even in less dramatic conditions, the safety of personnel engaged in support of frontline activity is a major priority for the Service.

To demonstrate its commitment to keeping its people safe, CFRS has chosen BS OHSAS 18001 as a framework for putting in place a robust, third party certified management system to manage and continually improve health and safety across its 28 sites.

Having chosen the standard, CFRS began implementing the requirements into the day-to-day running of the Service. BS OHSAS 18001 has provided Cambridgeshire with a solid foundation to create the best possible working conditions for its staff, with measures to mitigate health and safety risks beyond the scope of the certification to the field, where safe systems of work are used to prevent exposing fire fighters to unnecessary risks.

Benefits

Iain Low, CFRS Health and Safety Advisor, comments that the service has "achieved all that we set out to do". He went on to explain that for them, it was all about "making sure the structure was there and making it simple.

Our BS OHSAS 18001 system has ensured that all employees have a clear idea of what has to be done, by when and by whom. Because personnel do move around, we need consistency of approach across our sites and the management systems approach has helped us achieve this."

Through its certification to BS OHSAS 18001, CFRS has benefited from better reporting processes and practices. Iain Low explains that "BS OHSAS 18001 has brought about improved reporting of near misses by staff, with the organization getting a lot of incidents recorded that would have previously gone unreported. This has allowed us to better identify the nature of incidents and put in place corrective actions to prevent future accidents across our sites."

Although accident rates have not historically been high, CFRS has still benefited from a reduction in accidents, further improving its performance.

Through its certification to BS OHSAS 18001, CFRS has also been able to demonstrate to its staff and stakeholders that health and safety is at the heart of what it does.

Implementation

CFRS were eager to become the first fire and rescue service to roll out BS OHSAS 18001 in the UK.

Having come up with the concept, senior management took time to ensure they had the right personnel in place to move the programme forward. A decision was made to bring in new staff members with previous BS OHSAS 18001 experience. David Taylor was employed as the dedicated Health and Safety Manager, and Iain Low and Trudi Hellwing were later brought in to provide a wider range of experience and skills to support the existing individuals responsible for health and safety.

CFRS opted for a phased introduction, implementing the new system at its headquarters and full time stations, prior to extending its scope to include its retained duty stations.

A major challenge that the senior management team had to overcome was getting buy-in for the adoption of a systems approach for managing health and safety. Being a very safety conscious organization already, due to the dangerous nature of the work that they do, there were some individuals who initially questioned the value.

The experience of the implementation team provided CFRS with an immediate advantage in implementing an effective framework to

identify and manage hazards as well as engage and motivate staff with better, safer working conditions. And with the implementation team not being fire fighters, there was little divide, enabling a collaborative way of working. Employees at all levels and functions were consulted to bring about the required change.

CFRS's primary focus in implementing its BS OHSAS 18001 system was giving its staff the support and training to deal with any situation and properly assess the risks to health and safety.

Having undertaken its own gap assessment, CFRS commenced its stage 1 and stage 2 assessments, and successfully met the requirements of the standard, with certification awarded in May 2011. In total, it took the just over a year from the decision to move forward to getting certified.

BSI's role

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has worked with BSI for a number of years, having achieved earlier certification to BS 25999 for business continuity and ISO/IEC 27001 for information security, driven by a need to protect confidential information and ensure the right information to the right people at the earliest opportunity.

In addition to providing third party certification services, BSI Training was called upon to deliver in-house health and safety sessions. This involved presentations to the management team to make sure that they understood their responsibilities, both legally under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act and as part of the requirements of BS OHSAS 18001.

"BSI has helped us understand that the systematic management of health and safety is vital to the successful operation of our organization. Working with a trusted provider we have learnt to use standards to help us focus on people and processes rather than creating a burden of paperwork. BS OHSAS 18001 informs us that it is important to keep documentation proportionate to the hazards and risks, and that documentation should be kept to the minimum required for effectiveness and efficiency," said Iain Low, CFRS Health and Safety Advisor.

As CFRS nears the end of its first three-year certification cycle, the organization has taken the decision to complement its existing systems for managing business continuity, information security, and health and safety with the addition of ISO 14001 for environmental management.

