



Employers have clear legal duties to protect employees and users of their factories and offices against exposure to the coronavirus. This becomes more challenging when you operate globally. Emma-Jane Batey reports

People didn't sign off corporate emails with 'Be safe!' before March 2020. Keeping safe has taken on a whole new meaning since the global pandemic has pulled the rug out from all of us. Health and safety has always had a responsibility beyond a legal requirement, yet now corporations value its role in keeping its workforce – and its profits – as safe as possible.

The role of health and safety in a global manufacturing business is paramount in clarifying the behavioural expectations of a company's workforce, particularly in the production area where equipment and personnel can be moving around in potentially dangerous conditions. Workers have the right to expect that their workplace has been effectively analysed for risks, with those risks reduced and mitigated, and suitable training regularly offered.

For global manufacturers that operate factories in various countries, the different legal regulations and cultural expectations can make it difficult to establish and maintain a standardised agreement of health and safety performance, yet, in order to deliver a positive environment for its employees, a common H&S management system is desirable. Multinational plastics packaging manufacturer Retal is currently undertaking a large cross-facility project to define and implement a standardised H&S management system throughout its 17 factories, with locations in Western, Eastern and Central Europe, Russia, and the US, with the goal to formalise its strict health and safety standards in every factory.



The project is led by sustainability director Emmanuel Duffaut and project manager Marlene Riethus, with their team of quality managers from various locations, in order to bring a balanced view of what health and safety means to Retal.

Riethus explains: "We've called the project 2BSafe and it's dedicated to building a baseline health and safety standard that is implemented across all our global factories. A defined, robust H&S management system helps to create clear directions and processes that protect our workforce and the people that visit our facilities. The aim of 2BSafe is to bring all our factories up to the same highest standards, rather than simply complying with local laws and regulations."

Creating a common management system for health and safety in a global manufacturing business requires clear analysis of where each factory is currently, in order to establish where attention needs to be paid and what policies are in place. Duffaut shares how this approach needs to have cooperation from across the project team as well as from the wider company.

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Part of the project has involved the sharing of Best Practice between each factory and, depending on the layout of each particular site, implementing as much as possible in advance of local regulations.

Retal has also totally separated production shifts with no cross-over in entrances or exits, and separate canteens and toilets, while all production workers have their temperatures taken before every shift. Delivery drivers do not exchange paperwork, with everything done digitally or posted into a designated letterbox. Additional cleaning has also been implemented across production sites every two hours.

Transparent safety

Coronavirus has shown that implementation of a transparent, practical health and safety policy can allow for rapid changes to be made when unprecedented situations occur, with Retal utilising the Quality Management protocol already in place across all factories as soon as the virus hit.

“This quality management protocol document clearly shows how additional health and safety measures could be implemented at each factory,” adds Duffaut, “with a clear risk analysis of various situations, such as changing shifts without the teams coming into contact, how documents from delivery drivers should be done online to avoid physical contact, and how canteens should have separate areas for each shift. The general managers from each factory said how helpful it was to have these decisions made quickly and clearly, with a global policy in advance of local regulations. As we were lucky to be in an ‘essential’ business, keeping production running smoothly and protecting our production workers was paramount.”

The value of seeing how a standardised policy can help save time, money and stress across a globally-active business has helped to boost the 2BSafe project, with the safety of people at its heart.

“We want everyone at Retal to work within the same H&S management system,” notes Riethus. “As a global company with increasingly active global communications, we need to demonstrate to our stakeholders that we are OneRetal. It helps to protect employees, to be more effective, to attract talent, to avoid litigation, to reduce downtime. There are so many positive aspects.”

Standardisation in health and safety brings economies of scale for resources management too, with buying PPE for the whole group more cost effective, while also reducing the difficulty in sourcing the right volumes of these crucial supplies.

“A global management system for health and safety brings commercial benefits as well as protecting our people, bringing comfort and clarity across all our factories,” adds Duffaut. “We standardise our manufacturing for our portfolio of preforms, closures and films, so our factories largely face the same processes, the same issues and the same risk. By understanding what can be standardised and how we can best implement the measures that keep our people safe, we are keeping our business safe too.”

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