

A-SAFE polymer barriers are first choice for Outokumpu

Producing around 2.4 million tonnes of stainless steel a year and employing 10,000 people worldwide, the Finnish company Outokumpu is a global leader in stainless steel. It is also uncompromising about workplace safety. Following extensive refurbishments at its Sheffield Stainless Steel Coil and Plate Service Centre, the company required impact protection and traffic management that represented the very best practice in health and safety. It turned to the expertise of A-SAFE for a comprehensive solution.

Sheffield was built on steel manufacturing and although most of the forges and furnaces have long since gone, its strong association with the steel industry remains. Nowhere more so than at Outokumpu's substantial UK service centre in the Tinsley district of the city, just a stone's throw from where stainless steel was first invented in 1913.

Outokumpu is Europe's largest stainless steel company, producing and processing around 2.4 million tonnes of the material every year. Headquartered in the Finnish capital of Helsinki, the company has operations in more than thirty countries. Outokumpu's Tinsley site is an important element of the company's global operations – in one of its largest home markets. With a melt-shop and workshops for processing and finishing both stainless steel plate and coil, it is the only facility of its kind in the UK. The site engineers and finishes precision stainless steel components for multiple specialist applications in areas such as manufacturing and the nuclear industry. It employs more than 500 people and keeping them safe is a priority both for the company and for its UK Operations Manager, Billy Race.



Steve Longmore and Billy Race

Therefore, when Outokumpu was planning to renovate its 20,000 square-metre Plate Service Centre (PSC) building in Tinsley, there could be no compromise on workplace safety. Working with sheets of stainless steel presents a number of health and safety challenges: most significant among these, the multiple forklift trucks, side-loaders and cranes in constant operation on the shop floor. The PSC is equipped with an array of sophisticated plasma, laser, waterjet and fibre cutting machines. Safeguarding this vital equipment, its operators and pedestrian traffic from the risk of impact from vehicles transporting heavy sheets of steel was an essential consideration for the renovation project, "It was really a key thing for us to protect our employees and visitors from the mobile plant on site," Race explains.



After clearing half of the PSC workshop and carrying out a complete programme of renovations that included skimming and polishing the shop floor to a shine, Outokumpu called upon the expertise of A-SAFE to ensure that its workplace safety infrastructure and traffic management reflected the same exemplary standards as the rest of the revamped facility. The Tinsley site was among the vanguard of early adopters of polymer safety barriers back in the early 2000s – when A-SAFE first pioneered the technology and high-maintenance steel workplace barriers were still the norm – so for Race and his team, A-SAFE was the natural choice for the renovation.



The workplace safety experts from A-SAFE worked with the British Standards Institution PAS13 code of practice to design a best-practice workplace safety and traffic management concept for Outokumpu that fulfilled the highest standards of both pedestrian protection and operational efficiency. Incorporating third-generation A-SAFE traffic and pedestrian barriers, together with inward-opening safety gates at vehicle crossing points, the bespoke solution ensured that the most significant levels of impact protection were concentrated in areas where there was a real risk of vehicle impact. Barriers were positioned to protect and segregate pedestrian walkways, as well as to direct vehicle traffic away from vulnerable areas of the shop floor, "The information and advice we got from A-SAFE was really good. We worked closely with them and looked where we had any interaction with people and the mobile plant to see how we could make those areas safer. At the same time, we wanted to protect the new bits of plant that we purchased," Race says. However, not all areas of the Outokumpu facility required heavy-duty traffic impact protection, "There were places, like the entrance to the PSC, where there can't be any mobile plant. We just went with a normal pedestrian barrier there."

The Outokumpu site in Tinsley has an exemplary safety record and already had a number of highly effective measures already in place to safeguard employees, "We've got very good procedures. We have the RFID system (a radio tag warning system to warn forklift drivers when a pedestrian is in the vicinity); we have high-vis clothing and training for forklift drivers and operators," says Race. "But the new solution gives us that extra level of comfort that we are reducing risk. Our safety procedures are best practice, but we're always striving to make them even better. It's all about reducing the risk of an accident."

During the process of installation, Race and his team were impressed by both the attention to detail of the A-SAFE team and their commitment to workplace safety, "Everything was done right. We didn't have to do anything. We run a permit to work system for our contractors and audit them from time to time. Not once did we have to pull anything up on the A-SAFE guys," he says.



The renovated half of the PSC has now been operational for a few months and the new A-SAFE solution has already had a positive effect. Clearly defined walkways make it much easier for pedestrians to move safely around the facility, while heavy-duty barriers provide them with the reassurance that they are fully protected. Race and his team are also impressed with the new safety gates and how they have helped encourage greater awareness of vehicles operating on the shop floor, "because they open inwards, they make you stop before you step out," he says.

Race also believes that the look of the new A-SAFE solution has perfectly complemented the 5S system of continuous improvement in place throughout Outokumpu, "We make the workplaces as aesthetically good as possible. We have all the tools in the right place. We de-clutter and get rid of rubbish. Our housekeeping standard is really high. The new barriers create the wow factor," he says, "Senior management visited us around the summertime, and they were very impressed. They were really pleased with how it looked from a manufacturing point of view, from the 5S point of view. They asked what the barriers were, and they were very complimentary about everything we've done to the Plate Service Centre."

Race and his team now plan to work with A-SAFE on renovating the other half of the PSC to the same high standard, "We'll re-do the floor, define the walkways and install more A-SAFE products. So, there's much more to do. This isn't a finished project as yet."



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Billy Race - UK Operations Manager

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