

**The health and safety of both its own workers and those of its customers is of paramount importance to Pirtek and is the very cornerstone of the company's ongoing commitment to training.**

Quarrying and mining; construction and demolition; agriculture and industry; rail and military. All very different sectors, each with their own specific challenges, needs and demands. But there is one common thread that joins these seemingly disparate industries; the need for and a commitment to the health and safety of its workers.

We live in an age in which health and safety is no longer considered a necessary evil but a vital, full-time role, one that requires individuals and organisations to keep abreast of a multitude of rules and regulations, to see risks where forebears saw only opportunities, and where on-the-job training must be preceded by intensive pre-entry education. Indeed, it is difficult for even the most safety minded company to keep ahead of the latest legislative requirements for one industry sector, let alone 12.

### **Perceived Risks**

Yet that is precisely the challenge taken up by Pirtek and its National Training Centre in Birmingham. "In general, our customers have to know the legal requirements of just one specific industry sector," says national training manager Martyn Smart. "But Pirtek works in partnership with customers serving more than a dozen industry sectors, often in close proximity to known and perceived risks. It is vital, therefore, that we at Pirtek understand and adhere to the specific legal requirements of each industry sector." According to Smart, this understanding of industry requirements begins with the training of staff at all levels of the Pirtek organisation from the Licensee that effectively owns each individual Pirtek hose centre through the management and administrative positions within the Centre and on to the Mobile Sales and Service Technicians (MSST) that man the organisation's 400-strong fleet of Mobile Service Workshop vehicles.

"Every member of the Pirtek organisation goes through our training programme and a large part of those training programmes is taken up with matters of health and safety," Smart continues. "But when we get to the MSSTs, we start to focus even more."



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## Diverse Applications

According to Smart, it is not unusual for individual MSSTs to make up to 10 customer service calls in a single day, often in 10 different industry sectors. "Looking at the Midlands alone, an MSST can be working at a car manufacturing plant in the morning, on a quarry site at lunchtime and beside a railway track in the afternoon," he continues. "Each of these work sites will have their own industry requirements and, increasingly, may even have site specific health and safety requirements to which we must adhere."

Smart reports that, in addition to their City & Guilds and basic health and safety training, the majority of Pirtek MSSTs are qualified to CPCS standards, allowing them to work on UK construction sites. In addition, many MSSTs are qualified to Quarry industry "safety passport" standards and an increasing number also have Personal Trackage (PTS) qualifications that allow them to work on the country's rail network. "Both the quarry and the rail industry safety standards are particularly exacting," Smart says. "As an example, the PTS qualifications involves regular and random alcohol and drug testing, something that is fast becoming the norm among major UK construction companies."

## Workwear and PPE

As a further example, Smart cites the issue of workwear and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements. "Most UK construction sites these days require hard hats, high visibility jacket or vest, and site boots although, increasingly, our MSSTs are also required to wear goggles and gloves," Smart continues. "In the quarry sector, however, companies like Tarmac insist that they wear orange high visibility trousers and lace-up, non-rigger type boots. Not only do MSSTs have to change safety mindset from job to job, they often have to change their wardrobe as well."

To help identify the specific, individual requirements of the various industry sectors, Pirtek enlisted the support of an outside agency that surveyed each of Pirtek's 90+ UK and Ireland Centres to identify the numerous sectors and applications in which MSSTs were likely to work.

"As a result of the work conducted by our consultants, each of our 90+ Centres now has a highly-detailed set of safety guidelines detailing the specific risks and requirements across a base of 36 industries and applications," Smart asserts. "And that consultation is ongoing so that list is constantly growing."

At a time when many companies are seeking cost-saving measures, Pirtek continues to invest in the health and safety training of its own personnel to help maintain the safety levels of its customers. "We opened the new, larger and relocated National Training Centre in April 2008 and, so far, we have trained well over 200 Pirtek people here but it is an ongoing process," Smart continues. "In addition to the formalised training we offer here, all our MSSTs are subject to regular Toolbox Talks at their Centres."

## Working with Customers

Smart believes that safety is a mindset, one that he and his team regularly instil and reinforce in the Pirtek workforce. "Our training gives the MSSTs the tools they need to conduct their own risk assessments each time they step out of their vehicle. We also foster an open door policy that encourages MSSTs to report to their Centre Managers or Licensee any unforeseen or unavoidable risk on a customer's site," he says. "We also empower the MSSTs to take the attitude of 'if you can't avoid the risk, don't do the job' whenever they encounter an insurmountable hazard."

Martyn Smart further believes that Pirtek's thousands of customers across the UK can help the company raise its safety levels even further. "In addition to the huge number of industry safety regulations, an increasingly large number of companies and organisations also have their own specific safety policies. But it is vital that they keep us informed on these specific requirements," Smart concludes. "I would like all our customers to trust us with their health and safety policies in the same way they trust us with the welfare of their hydraulic systems."