

# DOING THE RIGHT THING VERSUS DOING THINGS RIGHT: ABM UK'S EXPERT LIFTS THE LID ON HOW HEALTH & SAFETY HAS EVOLVED WITH THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

August 2019, Jeff Hilton, Head of QHSE, ABM



Health and safety values are integrated at the heart of ABM.

The perception that health and safety (H&S) is exclusively about 'ticking boxes' is a far cry from the reality of the industry today. Now head of Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment (QHSE) and Sustainability at ABM UK, Jeff Hilton pursued a career in H&S after a gust of wind swept him off a roof while plastering and he was saved by safety netting.

Here, Jeff highlights how health and safety regimes have evolved to keep up with technology and new innovations, and the benefits of this to the cleaning industry.

## Changing Attitudes

At ABM, health and safety values are integrated at the heart of all areas of the business, from HVAC and energy services to critical solutions and cleaning operations. H&S is changing as a result of a collaborative 'one team' approach to getting the job done. Instead of health and safety being an obstacle to business operations, it allows ABM to take care of its customers' people, places, and spaces, in the safest and most efficient way possible.

When we think of H&S as a state of mind, we are all more aware of how we can improve our practices every day and keep everyone safe. In response to a new challenge, a common response for a health and safety team ten years ago was ‘no, this won’t work’. Today, this attitude has evolved into the much more positive response of ‘how can we make this happen?’

### **What You Don’t See**

Similar to the cleaning industry, it is important to reduce the burden on operations and reduce touch points to ensure all teams are working efficiently. These operations contribute to the wider society so standards must be kept high. In public spaces, the aim is that the consumer or client sees as little of the cleaning and H&S teams as possible – this is the ultimate goal! Behind the scenes, H&S and cleaning teams are working seamlessly to ensure sites are cleaned to the best condition and all risks are calculated and managed. For this to run smoothly, collaboration is key. Understanding the needs of the client by having regular planning meetings is paramount in delivering a high-quality service.

### **Improvements to Cleaning Technologies**

New products and technology in the cleaning industry have made the role of H&S a lot more straightforward in many instances. For example, cleaning products are not just about a heady mix of water and chemicals – some buildings can now use light technology to kill certain bacteria.

Equipment has also changed over the years with smaller, cordless, and compact equipment that can be strapped to a person’s back, reducing the risk of injury to the operative as well as those around them. The benefits of these new innovations – for example: or, a vacuum adapted to make less noise – allow cleaners to work almost invisibly during office hours, reducing interruption to office workers and making daytime cleaning more attractive to the client.

### **Environmental Focus**

In the last decade, sustainability has been introduced to core operations and implemented in every aspect of business. In order for sustainability initiatives to be delivered successfully, health and safety teams need to be aware of the targets and practices in place. By understanding how they can work in compliance with sustainability initiatives, they can also communicate this knowledge through their work to customers and other team members to increase adoption.

Although ABM has introduced the GreenCare® customised environmental management programme for buildings, one of the business’ aims will be to focus on ways in which the company can become carbon neutral, and H&S will be a part of achieving this.

Not only are we doing things right – by the book – we are doing the right thing by adapting to client needs and helping to protect the environment – all the while keeping our people safe!

In five years’ time, I would like to see a positive shift in perceptions of the health and safety industry continue and an even more integrated approach to how it is used in the workplace.



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