

CLOSE TIES

Although they may appear to be unrelated, ergonomics and sustainability really are bound together

Improving working conditions through ergonomics, protection of the environment and the various aspects of sustainable development are inseparable. These elements are shaped by regulatory controls and voluntary commitments, both of which are an expression of a greater desire to work in harmony. In a company such as SOLYSTIC, personnel are the first to become involved, with subcontractors and service providers following thereafter. It is also important that our customers, as well as the various health, safety and environment organisations are fully integrated into this approach.

"Initially the regulations only dealt with product characteristics," explains Pierre Patry, SOLYSTIC's director of strategy. "Over the years they have been extended to cover environment and social responsibility – the corporate equivalent of what sustainable development is to the state."

The regulations now operate at several different levels: worldwide by the Kyoto agreements and the Global Pact; at the European level by EU directives; and at the corporate level through voluntary commitments, contracts incorporating mandatory provisions and additional customer requirements.

"Back in the 1990s we chose to adopt the highest standards for the benefit all of our clients, regardless of national regulatory requirements," says Yves Lebreton, quality design and development manager at SOLYSTIC. "To give an example, in the days of CRT monitors the Swedish TCO standards were much stricter than the directives in terms of emissions and user comfort. We applied them even in markets where they were not required." SOLYSTIC's constant battle to anticipate trends meant that it obtained ISO 9001 certification in 1994, and ISO 14001 approval in 2007 at the first attempt.

Another example of this approach is noise reduction in machines and the ceiling set by European directives at 85dB. "Today our systems are around 69dB for the most



MARS can process up to 40,000 mailpieces per hour

exposed workstations in the sorting centres," Lebreton states. "For MARS, the level was lowered to 65dB."

However even a slight noise can be an annoyance, so it is most important to work with operators under real working conditions. The SOLYSTIC MARS mail sorting equipment is sometimes installed inside post offices. Workers, who

Legislation and directives

SOLYSTIC operates within the framework of French national legislation and European directives. Initially the company met the requirements of customer contracts within the regulatory framework such as it was at the time, on a case-by-case basis. Companies then wanted such standards to appear in the equipment specifications. In 1987 the first ISO 9001 standard was drafted, mainly dealing with a respect for contractual obligations. In 1994 the revised standard became much more demanding, involving documentary references. The 2000 version introduced the idea of ongoing measurement. Little by little environment matters increased in importance and in 1996 gave rise to the first ISO 14001 standards.

Health and Safety at Work legislation was developed over time and resulted in the OHSAS 18000 guidelines (not a standard) covering manufacturing company operations and procedures.

previously manually sorted the mail, under conditions where the only environmental noise was from a radio, can now use the equipment without any specific qualifications. "For them to adapt to the equipment two conditions had to be met," explains Lebreton. "It had to be easy to use and it couldn't generate much noise."

When the first MARS equipment was installed in the UK all operator tasks were analysed, and even minor aspects that could be potentially perceived as an annoyance were eliminated. Maintenance was also a concern: "Every component that couldn't be handled by a single operator was repositioned," says Patry. "We added rails so that the compressor could be removed without lifting. For components such as motors, which are not usually replaced, such precautions may seem unnecessary but we dealt with everything. "Our customers analysed all these aspects and compared suppliers over periods lasting several months. Each time the decisive factor was the way the personnel took to the equipment.

SOLYSTIC's customers, as well as postal operators, are seen by the public as



The compact and ergonomic design of the SOLYSTIC MARS mail sorting equipment means that it can fit into any branch office

'trustworthy partners'. They have to be able to state and demonstrate that they care about the future of our planet. These efforts have led them to reduce their carbon footprints in the production process, as well as in the use of and decommissioning of their installations. Acting against the greenhouse effect, a source of global warming, they have been able to reinforce their image of responsibility. In January 2006 SOLYSTIC's CEO committed himself to "implementing a voluntary environmental policy."

Since April 2007 SOLYSTIC's voluntary adoption of the ISO 14001 standard has demonstrated its desire to maintain this level with their clients in this approach. "Everyone has to be aware of one's social responsibilities: this is the responsibility chain," notes Patry.

All the products that SOLYSTIC uses are subject to carbon footprint analysis and, if necessary, supported by compensation. Directives that cannot be applied to products manufactured by SOLYSTIC – because they fall into the large industrial equipment category – are nevertheless taken into consideration by the company.

For example Lebreton mentions the RoHS, on the use of hazardous substances, and the WEEE, governing the recycling of polluting products. "We apply them by removing forbidden substances and by working on the decommissioning of our products."

Suppliers must be certified before being able to tender. This is made easier by the proximity of the industrial base that SOLYSTIC draws on and nearly 97 percent of its subcontractors are subject to regular inspections. "The declaration of compliance is the company's responsibility," underlines Patry. "We apply quality measures both to ourselves and to our subcontractors and we have an external organisation validate all electrical subjects, even though we are not required to do so."

In January 2007 SOLYSTIC stated, "The company and our shareholders share the civic vision of our clients concerning the present and future quality of life of our employees and the public." This vision is demonstrated through the constant anticipation of regulatory developments, which have helped SOLYSTIC meet certification requirements without difficulty. The application of ergonomics is based on

one fact: users must take to the machines. SOLYSTIC's clients can achieve their objectives only if the equipment genuinely improves working conditions. To keep the status of 'trustworthy operator' that the public has rightly conferred upon them, post offices require their suppliers to guarantee best environmental practice. In this area SOLYSTIC is part of an extended chain of responsibility – a chain that also includes suppliers in the recycling sectors.

Far from reducing competitiveness, these efforts go towards improving it. Thus SOLYSTIC's approach to integrating all the different standards as well as its voluntary development, are the result of striving for long-term efficiency throughout the lifetime of the product.

FIND OUT MORE

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