



MARSHALLING RESOURCES

Four years ago Marshall's embarked on a major fleet replacement programme with the emphasis on workplace safety. Brian Weatherley examines its achievements - and productivity gains along the way

Shakespeare wrote "...some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them." Substitute 'change' for 'greatness' and you could be talking about health and safety in road transport, as accident reduction projects are just as likely to be driven by customers as by operators themselves.

It's a phenomenon Guy Ripley, regional logistics and fleet manager at landscaping products giant Marshall's, recognises. "The building industry is highly regulated and continues to push forward with health and safety, [so] many of our blue chip clients have incredibly strict safety policies."

Why so strict? Because delivering to

unmade building sites is demanding. Marshall's drivers are frequently required to unload in difficult site areas and, obviously, without harming product or personnel.

So, four years ago, the UK's largest operator of 44-tonne drawbar and artic crane trucks embarked on a major project to deliver a new vehicle specification capable of significantly reducing workplace accidents. And the results to date are impressive. So much so that late last year Marshall's risk-reduction strategy was recognised with a CLT (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport) safety award.

How did Marshall's do it? Ripley says the firm started by "challenging long-

standing thinking". That meant first conducting in-depth analysis of historic driver injury data, examining in particular falls from height and load security incidents. That focused minds.

Prior to 2011, Marshall's drivers used ride-on top seat cranes to transfer product to ground level - an obvious work at height risk. With its new spec, the company has switched to Hiab XS 099 HiPro Roller cranes capable of remote control, either from a safe standing position on the vehicle load bed or, where possible, from ground level. Additionally, on the company's latest prime movers a 'safety cell' has been created, with the crane programmed such that loads held in the

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grab cannot enter the protected area, regardless of operator control actions.

While ground level working is always desirable, there are inevitably times when a driver has to climb on to the load bed – not least when unlashng loads. So, to prevent falls from a semi-trailer when drivers need to do this, they now affix a lightweight detachable aluminium ladder to the side raves, below grab handles incorporated into the side posts.

With designated rear access points, the driver can thus safely climb up or down using the ‘three points of contact’ method. When the ladder is not required it is stowed under the trailer deck. Similarly, Marshalls’ latest drawbar

of the less obvious safety measures adopted by Marshalls concerns a redesigned side load restraint system. Ripley explains that before 2011, the firm’s data registered several driver injuries caused by the metal drop sides.

DROPSIDE RISKS


“They were made from aluminium sections approximately 2.5m long,” he says, adding that each semi-trailer had eight, all hinged at the bottom with locks at the top. With each sideboard weighing 100kg, there was clearly potential for head, neck and facial injury caused by one dropping on to a driver. “In bad weather, and particularly if product packs had slipped, there could

However, these curtains are equipped with a trio of three-tonne rated webbing straps running longitudinally along the bottom, middle and top of the curtain. All three are then tensioned around the end pole.

Not only are the new curtains more user friendly if they contact a driver, but they also function as a fall-restraint when fully deployed in the upright position. And there’s a further benefit: with the new design, any bulges in the curtain indicate likely movement of the load – meaning drivers are forewarned. Incidentally, to bear down on issues around load slippage, Marshalls’ latest generation of SDC trailers also comes with punch-plate decking, designed to grip product in-transit, as well as multiple lashing rings set in bespoke side-raves.

And the result: Marshalls’ new side load security curtains have delivered an equally impressive drop in accidents related to side-boards and posts – from nine in 2010 to just one in 2014. Moreover, the reduction in kerb weight resulting from the use of much lighter reinforced curtains has meant a potential for increased payloads. “In addition, the benefit of fewer lost days due to accidents is paying dividends within the operation,” comments Ripley.

So much for the design revisions: deploying the latest safety spec vehicles to Marshalls’ 145-strong fleet then involved a phased approach, completed during 2014. And last year a further 31 vehicles were added to the same specification in response to the ongoing economic recovery.

Ripley reckons the success of this project is in large part due to establishing a close working relationship with its suppliers. “Together with CVL, Ryder, SDC and Hiab, we were able to produce a vehicle design that, in my opinion, is industry leading. It’s surpassed all my expectations.” 

Change management tips

How did Ripley take the fleet in his new direction? Marshalls’ drivers were involved in discussions throughout the journey, he answers. He concedes that getting a consensus on equipment and processes isn’t always easy, but says his own driving experience over the years stood him in good stead.

“Initially, there was some resistance. We have an older driver workforce... Many had been doing the job for a long time [so] change management was a challenge. But after a few months this died away and I’m confident that the guys are now very happy with the new equipment.”

Buying the latest generation Volvo,

Mercedes-Benz and DAF prime movers and artics also went down well. “I deliberately went for a high spec on the tractor units as I knew that this would motivate, and retain and attract drivers. I wasn’t wrong,” he says.

But perhaps the most significant aspect of the change process concerns how Ripley went about introducing the new equipment into the fleet. “I’ve held a full-day handover for every truck, trailer and drawbar issued,” he explains.

“This included support from the manufacturers and training from our in-house team. I also chaired each session, which allowed me to discuss the spec in detail with every driver. I firmly believe this has helped acceptance.”

prime movers and trailers also feature slide-out steps for safe access.

The proof of the pudding: since adopting this approach, accidents related to driver access have reduced from four in 2012 to zero in 2014. “This change has had the effect of completely eradicating falls from the trailer, vehicle body or crane,” Ripley confirms.

But there’s more. While slips, trips and falls inevitably attract attention, one

be great pressure on the dropsides. So when a driver opened them, they could come down rapidly, resulting in injuries.”

The solution: a load barrier offering the same lateral load restraint and no longer capable of injuring a driver. Marshalls’ approach has been to replace the metal dropsides with a 950mm high, conventionally tensioned side curtain. “Essentially they’re the same as full-height curtains,” acknowledges Ripley.