



Spotlight on safety

➤ **At the end of last year**, the Health and Safety Executive launched new guidance on worker involvement which encouraged co-operation and joint working between all stakeholders to raise health and safety awareness. **Nick Cook** visited a construction project which has adopted a novel approach to doing just that.

Wow! This is the word that best sums up the reaction of the audience as the doors swing open. It is a perfectly understandable reaction. After all, the last thing you expect to find in the middle of a building site is a theatre.

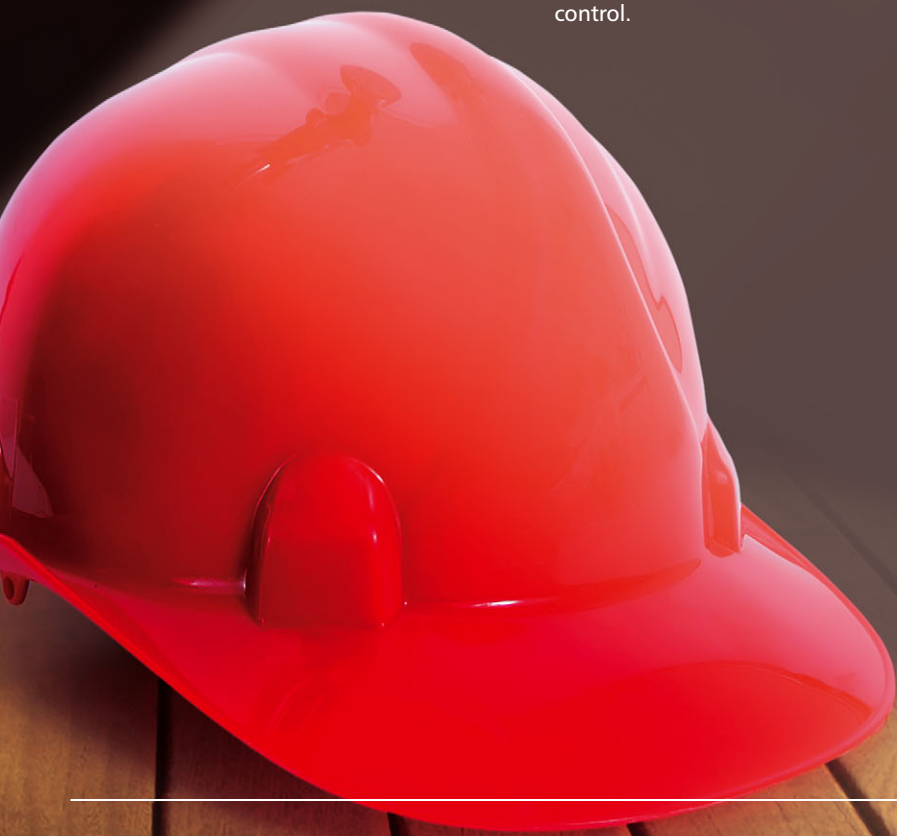
A spotlight guides the audience to their seats. On a screen above the stage a movie star races along the dizzyingly high girders of a half-constructed building not unlike the one in which the theatre is located. He is in hot and hair-raising pursuit of the villain. Both pursuer and pursued show scant regard for the finer points of risk assessment and control.

The theatre is located in what is currently an empty space on the ground floor of a multi-storey building, which is still very much under construction. When complete the building will be a state-of-the-art laboratory block and the space where the unique theatre is located will become a suite of conference rooms.

The audience is not your typical theatre audience, it is made up largely of workers from the construction site. The workers are minus their hard hats. The theatre has been isolated from the rest of the site and PPE rules have been relaxed.

With the audience in place, the background music dies, the screen fades and the live drama begins. A jester walks into the foreground. He welcomes the audience to the play. It is intriguingly entitled "Headbangers". ➤

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Prevention in Practice



➤ Scenes from "Headbangers"

"I wanted to highlight the potential human cost of getting it wrong."

The play was born out of a partnership between pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca and the Austin Company, an organisation providing construction, engineering, design, consulting and management services.

Austin is one of eight sub-contractors working on the new laboratory block at AstraZeneca's Macclesfield site in Cheshire. AstraZeneca is both principal contractor on the project and client.

Both companies wanted to adopt a novel approach to raising awareness of the importance of risk assessment, as part of last year's European Week for Safety and Health at Work. Together, with enthusiastic help from all the other sub-contractors on site, they decided to make a drama about a hypothetical accident.

Of course using actors and plays to raise awareness of accidents is hardly original. Videos and DVDs dramatising accidents have been available for years. And more recently,

media companies have been offering live performances complete with audience involvement. But the *Headbangers* project carried involvement one step further. Here there would be no professional actors, no off the shelf play. The approach adopted on the Macclesfield construction site would be strictly DIY. The site's workforce would be both the audience and the performers.

"I wanted the whole experience to stick in their minds," says Graham Stewart, Austin UK's health and safety manager, who came up with the idea.

And this view was backed by Ian Chapman from AstraZeneca, the construction manager

in charge of the building project. He too was enthusiastic about bringing the theatre to the workforce.

"The site is their domain," he says. "They feel far more comfortable there than in an off-site training room."

Having got the green light, all Graham needed was someone to write and direct the play. As luck would have it he shared an office with the ideal candidate. Robert Naylor-Stables is Austin's director of facilities development and, importantly, is involved in amateur dramatics and thus was in a position to provide Graham with some, indeed the only, theatrical expertise.

Other on-site initiatives held to raise awareness of risk assessment on the construction project include:

- **Demystification of risk assessment** – three sessions each day for two days, lasting one hour – in classroom
- **Penalty shoot-out football** – six teams of four people – aimed at improving team working
- **Hazard spotting** – each session devoted time to spot hazards on site and enter a competition
- **Quiz week** – music, wordsearch, CITB toolbox talk questions and others
- **Temporary access fault finding** – mobile scaffold, MEWP, tube+clip and harness safety
- **Pictorial health & safety** – poster campaign and competition



But, although Robert had acted in countless plays he had never actually written one.

How challenging did he find the task?

"First of all I had to get the characterisation right," he says. "It was a play about everybody involved in the construction business and was acted by the construction team. I also needed to mix in a range of ingredients.

"Obviously the key ingredient was the central message about risk assessment. And naturally I wanted to highlight the potential human cost of getting it wrong. But I felt it was important to include a certain amount of humour and slapstick. If the play was enjoyable people would be more likely to remember the message."

In the end, the play actually came together quite quickly. A key feature of the whole project was involvement. Every sub-contractor on the site provided at least one actor. But how did these budding thespians feel about acting in front of their mates?

Riam Bateman is a scaffolder working for Interserve. He says: "I wanted to get involved right from the start. In fact, I told them I wanted the biggest part!"

Was he nervous?

"The trick is, if you are not confident with something you pretend you are. No matter how you feel inside you don't show that you are worried."

This strategy obviously worked for Riam. His excellent portrayal of a judge was both confident and hugely memorable.

Tony Jones, site supervisor with Hargreaves, played construction supervisor Archie.

"I was nervous at the beginning," he admits. "But there were four performances and towards the end my nerves eased a bit."

Andy Bishop was also nervous to begin with. He works for LCP and played one of the emergency crew. "It came from knowing the people in the audience," he says.

Enthusiasm

"Initially, it is fair to say, the enthusiasm was not sky high," says Robert. "At the first rehearsal the guys just drifted in. Many were late. I was beginning to wonder what I had let myself in for."

It was like that for the next rehearsal. But Robert did not give up. He tried to make the rehearsals fun. He made sure that everyone was busy all the time.

And then, by the third rehearsal, something happened. Momentum must have been slowly building. The actors suddenly became engaged. From then on the whole production rode the crest of a wave. The cast took ownership. Robert and Graham were amazed by the degree to which this happened. ➤

"I simply told them to imagine what they would do and say in a real situation."

Lights, camera, action... Here is a brief outtake from the play

Scene 1

Spotlights reveal a tower scaffold (stage right). Three construction workers are engaged in heavy football banter.

A jester walks into the foreground. He welcomes the audience to the play.

One of the construction workers, Jack, dons a safety harness prior to ascending the tower.

Scene 2

The spotlight illuminates a golf tee (stage left). Gerald Bentwick is the director of the construction company that employs Jack. As he practises his swing, risk assessment is clearly the last thing on his mind.

Scene 3

The action switches from the golf course back to the scaffold tower. Pandemonium. There are shouts and cries and sirens and somehow Jack is lying on the ground.

A team of paramedics carry a large plasterboard sheet, shaped and painted to depict an ambulance. They rush on stage to the accompaniment of the theme tune to "The A Team". Jack is loaded onto the stretcher. The ambulance and crew leave, taking Jack with them. This time they are accompanied by a siren and an authentic emergency flashing light.

The jester describes what has happened. Losing his hold, Jack has fallen from the scaffold. His fall was broken by the ground rather than by his harness.

Scene 4

Archie the construction supervisor calls Gerald Bentwick, the golf-playing director, to break the news of Jack's fall. The director is clearly irritated at the interruption to his golf but in the end agrees to return to the site.

The narrator updates the audience on Jack. The news is bad. He is lying in a coma. When – if – he regains consciousness he will learn that he has a fractured skull and damaged back.

Archie is clearly emotional at the prospect of having to break this news to Jack's wife. His task is made even harder by the knowledge that a birthday party for Jack's son had been arranged for the coming weekend.

Scene 5

The action is now centre stage. The scene is a courtroom. The jester tells the audience that Jack has been saved by a brain operation. Gerald, the director, is in the dock.

A terrifying judge enters the courtroom to the sound of "Here come de judge" being chanted by the whole court which has risen to its feet to greet him.

With the aid of a video, an HSE inspector explains to the court what went wrong. The generic risk assessment failed to identify that Jack's fall arrest equipment was the wrong equipment for that particular job. When Jack hit the ground the fall arrest cable was still playing out. It failed to arrest his fall because it was too long for the height at which Jack was working. A specific risk assessment would have identified the unsuitability of the equipment. But this was not done.

The judge announces his verdict. Gerald, the company director, has been negligent. He had not allowed the site supervisor time to perform a suitable, specific risk assessment.

The judge raises himself up to his full height and hurls a terrifying glare at the company director.

"Mr Bentwick," his voice is a thunderclap. "You will go to prison."

Gerald Bentwick collapses, head in hands.



Prevention in Practice

Companies involved in the "Headbangers" production

- Austin
- Greens
- Interserve
- SES
- AstraZeneca
- Cross
- Hargreaves
- LCP

Playing it safe ...



► From the top: Al Hinde (Cross Services Engineering), Andy Bishop (LCP), Ian Chapman (AstraZeneca), Prakash Davda (Austin UK), Riam "The Judge" Bateman (Interserve), and Tony Jones (Hargreaves)

Last year's *European Week for Safety and Health at Work* highlighted the importance of risk assessment as the first essential step for effective workplace health and safety management, but it was just one initiative in a two-year European-wide 'Healthy Workplaces' campaign which aims to reduce work-related accidents and illnesses by focusing on the assessment of health and safety risks.

As part of the campaign, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has produced a number of free resources to showcase practical ways in which workplace risks can be managed and reduced. These include posters, factsheets, risk assessment checklists and a risk management magazine. For further details, see:

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/campaigns/hw2008/>

For example, the workers playing the ambulance crew took it on themselves to make their plasterboard ambulance. Engineers made stands for the microphones. Other workers constructed the stage, changing room and installed stage lighting.

Nobody was late for rehearsals anymore and actors started contributing to their characters. Robert was particularly delighted when this happened.

"We needed them to contribute. To minimise disruption rehearsals were limited to five, each one lasting just half an hour. There simply wasn't enough time for them to rehearse every move so they had to ad lib. For example, during the play when the men were gathering round an injured worker after he had fallen from scaffold, I simply told them to imagine what they would do and say in a real situation."

And in his role as jester (the narrator) Robert could move from scene to scene, making sure the action rolled.

Success

After all the hard work, the play was a huge success. Firstly, it entertained and informed (everybody I interviewed for this article was crystal clear on the difference between generic and specific risk assessment – the play's theme). And for the actors, the journey was at least as important as the destination. Everybody took something from the experience.

Al Hinde, health and safety manager with Cross Services Engineering played an HSE inspector in the play. He comments: "It made me realise how behaviour is more important than legislation when it comes to controlling risks. A play like this can help ensure the correct behaviours are in place."

Riam (Judge) Bateman adds: "Learning how to do risk assessments is an important part of our jobs. You learn something better if it is fun and enjoyable."

For Tony Jones (who played the construction supervisor), the play highlighted the human costs of accidents, his role involved having to phone the wife of a construction

worker who was fatally injured. "I never want to have to do that for real," he says.

The play involved a wide range of people from different companies and different trades. This was of great value. As Prakash Davda, managing director of Austin UK, comments: "One would pay a fortune to consultants and invest a considerable amount of time for the teambuilding result achieved by this safety project."

Teambuilding is an essential part of the way the AstraZeneca construction project is run anyway. The whole project is underlined by the concept of an "alliance" between the contractors – the contractors help each other work together. And the alliance concept not only helped to make the play possible but was in turn reinforced by its success, and it is a success on which Austin's MD Prakash Davda is keen to build.

"I would like to see this approach rolled out to other areas and also used as a template for other risks," he says.

In the meantime a video of the play has been copied and is being distributed to the whole cast. And Riam Bateman is now famous right across the Macclesfield site as "Here come de judge".

Further information

- Guidance on involving the whole workforce in managing health and safety at work can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/involvement

"One would pay a fortune to consultants and invest a considerable amount of time for the team building result achieved by this safety project."