

# Herculean effort or Olympic gold?

**A**s we go to press, with London on the final countdown to the 2012 Olympics, plant engineers – although excited by the spectacle and impressed by the scale of the interdisciplinary project engineering that has made it all happen – will inevitably be focused on large and looming concerns.

Why? For a start, the HSE's (Health and Safety Executive) Fee for Intervention (FFI) cost recovery scheme commences on 1 October (page 3). So engineering and management teams will undoubtedly be under considerable pressure to redouble efforts aimed at ensuring and enforcing safe practice throughout their plants and factories, whatever the industry. That, in itself, is a major undertaking.

It's fine for Gordon MacDonald, HSE's programme director, to state that law-abiding firms have nothing to fear. And who could disagree with his sentiment that those breaking the law should pay, not the public purse? However, the worry will be that something, somewhere is going to catch even good plants out. Then, with FFI charged at £124 per hour, the bill could rapidly escalate. And what about the stigma?

But there's more. For the many plant engineers working in what are loosely termed energy-intensive industries (steel, cement, ceramics etc), there's confirmation that times are tougher than ever. A new report, 'Building Our Carbon Industries', published by the TUC and the Energy Intensive Users Group (EIUG), suggests that soaring energy costs, the UK's punitive emissions regime and high price tags for technologies to further improve green credentials are making UK plants uncompetitive.

That view is given weight by another study, this from BIS (the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). It warns that manufacturers and other heavy energy users are paying substantially more for their electricity than their European counterparts, because of the UK's pursuit of ambitious renewable energy targets and carbon pricing. And it reports that they will soon pay even more, turning the screw particularly on refineries, petrochemical and other chemical producers.

Add in the effects of the ongoing economic situation and it's small wonder that managers in engineering are working longer hours in more stressful conditions. Just how much is revealed in yet another new report, from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and Simplyhealth. Entitled 'The Quality of Working Life 2012', it finds that engineering managers now work on average 56 days' unpaid overtime per year, and that their physical and mental health are being impacted.

Not surprising, then, that plant engineers might be distracted during the Olympics.

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Comment