



Murphy Oil Corporation (Murco UK): how National Occupational Standards are making the petroleum industry safer and more efficient

Background

The Milford Haven Refinery was commissioned in 1973 by Amoco UK with Murco UK acquiring a 30 per cent interest in the refinery in 1980. Murco UK became sole owner operator in 2007. Its core business is in upstream (exploration), downstream (refining) and retail – it currently retails to 470 petrol stations.

370 people are employed on the refinery plus circa 150 contractors. A wide range of graduates are employed by Murco UK, including chemical, mechanical and environmental engineers, and operating technicians.

Getting involved with NOS from the inception

Dave Smith is Support Services Manager at Murco UK and is responsible for HR, IT and training. Dave took part in the development of the NOS in 1998. As an experienced and knowledgeable training manager, he explains how NOS has evolved:

“NOS were, and continue to be, developed by the industry for the industry. Industry representatives from various refineries around the UK formed a working party facilitated by the Sector Skills Council to develop National Occupational Standards. As a result, the NOS that we use here at Murco UK have been developed for technicians working within the petroleum industry.”

In 1998, Dave Smith and his colleagues at Milford Haven Refinery started building their training programme alongside the NVQs for technicians – and these NVQs were developed against the National Occupational Standards. Initially 12 employees were enrolled on the programme and now approximately 60 per cent of staff at Murco UK, including the company's maintenance apprentices, have qualifications based on NOS.

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Dave Smith is Support Services Manager at Murco UK

Staff benefits and a degree created using NOS

As individuals, staff at Murco UK know that they are qualified to a national standard and that the skills that they have acquired are transferable within the industry, should they want to apply for another job. NOS also give staff a recognised qualification that they can see has value.

As Dave states, training is an integral part of the company's philosophy which, when combined with NOS, has further benefits:

“We have a training programme which allows for continual staff development and we now offer a Foundation Degree in Process, Operations and Maintenance (in the petroleum industry) which is run in partnership with Pembrokeshire College and Trinity St David's University. The latter has now accredited Murco UK's training to 60 credits at NVQ Level 4 and above, and these qualifications are directly aligned to NOS. We are, I believe, the first company to offer a Foundation Degree using NOS.”

The practicalities of using NOS in an evolving industry

Dave Smith and his team have found that NOS have been easy to implement:

“Importantly,” says Dave, “you need to have the structure in place. It's simple to maintain and, in fact, National Occupational Standards are reviewed every three years by the Sector Skills Council along with ourselves. This ensures that standards are maintained and still relevant so that we can ensure that we still have the best qualified staff in an evolving industry.”

As the petroleum industry evolves, so Murco's staff must adapt their skills. One of the greatest benefits of NOS, maintains Dave is that “it evolves with us, thus giving flexibility to our staff.”

Using NOS to maintain safety at a major hazard site

Murco UK is a top-tier COMAH site (Control of Major Accidents) so it is highly regulated. The external regulators – the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Environment Agency – ensure that the company complies to all the rules and regulations, and that it can prove the competency of its staff. With safety of paramount importance, it is critical therefore that the company maintains nationally recognised training standards. This approach, says Dave, can lead to significant benefits:

“We have seen an improvement at Murco UK because we have had the standards to work from, which has led to a more consistent approach across the industry. As a result, the industry, which includes Murco UK, can be viewed as safer and more efficient. In addition, greater reliability can also be demonstrated in the operation of plants.”

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