Olympic park build success

Article
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Now that the Olympics are a distant memory there is an opportunity to not only reflect on the sporting achievements but the impressive health and safety record achieved on a construction project which throughout its life involved over 30,000 workers.

Research published jointly commissioned by the Olympic Delivery Authority, the Health and Safety Executive and the Institution of Civil Engineers has looked at how the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM) helped or hindered the construction of London 2012.

At the peak of the “big build” project the workforce was estimated to be around 12,000 people, and around 30,000 people would have worked on the Olympic Park and Athletes’ Village over the lifetime of the project. The research identifies those factors likely to have contributed to the high health and safety standards demonstrated throughout the build which resulted in no fatal accidents.

What made the project so safe?

The research does not pioneer any new approach adopted for the Olympic build but supports the argument that when the arrangements envisaged in the CDM Regulations are applied, they tend to work.

A key finding of the research was that the commitment shown by the Olympic Delivery Authority, as the client, to health and safety both from the outset and throughout the course of the project had a significant influence on the safety standards on site.

Success was also attributed to the structure of management adopted on site. Given its vast size the Olympic site was split into local areas which were each individually controlled by its own Principal Contractor. Thirty CDM coordinators were appointed from a number of organisations to oversee the CDM aspects of the work, who were themselves overseen by a CDM Integrator who had responsibility for producing a uniformly high standard of CDM coordination and a common approach throughout the work on the site. Integrated teams of Designers, Contractors and CDM Coordinators were also encouraged to meet early and often throughout the life of the project.

While the research found that the management arrangements for health and safety were relevant to good health and safety outcomes, it was contractor site health and safety initiatives focussing on worker level engagement which had even more impact. Essentially these focussed the best ways to get key messages across and encouraging workers to report ‘unsafe’ activities.

It may come as little surprise to many in the construction industry that the research indicated, therefore, that concerted effort and resource dedicated to behavioural safety measures on the ground managed to trump even the most sophisticated CDM-inspired management arrangements.

Related items:

- Download the full London 2012: The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 Dutyholder roles and impact report (PDF, 2,858KB)
- Read other research on various aspects of the Olympic build on the HSE website