



Syspal prepares for decommissioning opportunities

Fabrication specialist Syspal prepared to move into new sectors with support from the Fit For Nuclear programme.

Based a stone's throw from Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire, fabrication specialist Syspal has become one of Europe's most advanced fabrication shops for stainless steel and aluminium, supplying industries where cleanliness and quality are paramount. Its 10,000m² factory is a showcase for advanced manufacturing equipment, with Industry 4.0 technologies integrating its automated presses and laser cutters with design and production management.

"For a fabrication factory, we can say with confidence that it's as good as any in Europe," says managing director Chris Truman. "We have spent considerable time over years researching the most efficient production machinery and systems, resulting in a quite unique combination."

The bulk of Syspal's production is for the food processing sector, but its sub-contracting arm Manifab produces short-run components and complex bespoke assemblies for industries such as aerospace, defence and rail.

After being contracted to design and produce a degassing

room for a nuclear engineering services company, Truman began to look at further opportunities in nuclear. "We were intrigued about that industry, realising this was an opportunity to further improve our quality systems and skills," he recalls. "We are hopeful that the quality standards we are used to supplying will be transferable to the nuclear industry."

The Syspal team completed the initial F4N online self-assessment in August 2016. "We had a little bit of work to do," Truman notes. "F4N is very different to our general quality standards – it's more of a continuous journey. The first assessment is about saying you're capable of doing work for the sector, but you need to keep improving in various areas. The constant improvement is the important thing for us."

Driving those improvements was the responsibility of QHSE manager Ray Hoffman. "We've made a lot of progress in the past two and half years – we took on board all the advice, and our directors headed up the plan, committing resources to do what we needed to do," Hoffman says.



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Syspal’s rigorous approach to design and manufacture meant that the production side of the business easily met F4N standards, but the assessment did highlight room for development in areas such as organisational structure, strategic management and performance measurement.

Hoffman was supported by John Olver, one of the Nuclear AMRC’s team of regional industrial advisors, who regularly visited the factory to make sure Syspal’s journey was on track.

The F4N process has helped raise the awareness of quality systems even higher across the business. Syspal already had a host of qualifications including OHSAS 18001 for health and safety, ISO 9001 for quality management and ISO 13485 for medical devices, and is working towards ISO 14001 for environmental management. “Out of all of these, F4N was at a different level,” Truman says.

Syspal’s challenge now is to secure a first significant contract in the nuclear market, and build the relationship for long-term work in the sector.

“We are not just looking for one-off projects, we really want new challenges we can plan for and resource properly,” Truman says. “You can’t resource things that just come and go. It’s really important to see some progression when we can invest resources to build additional skills. We’re not afraid to invest in people, processes and training.”

Truman sees the biggest opportunities in decommissioning. Many of Syspal’s product lines for the food processing industry – including decontamination facilities, access control systems and container handling systems – have close equivalents at

decommissioning sites, and the firm also has the subcontracting expertise for demanding bespoke projects.

“We need to engage with companies in search of highly experienced stainless steel or aluminium fabricators with dedicated facilities for non-ferrous metals,” Truman says. “It might be a degassing chamber, it might be a glovebox. Our goal is to find a partner that’s completely focused on this industry, and become their partner in the supply and development of such products.”

As a first step towards understanding of the needs of the decommissioning market, Truman attended an information day with supply chain specialists from Sellafield Ltd, organised by the Nuclear AMRC in summer 2019. The event was “most enlightening”, he says.

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