



Outokumpu Stainless Distribution gets fit for new build

Steel provider Outokumpu Stainless Distribution (OSD) is targeting opportunities in nuclear new build after completing the Fit For Nuclear programme.

Part of the global Outokumpu group, Sheffield-based OSD is the UK service centre for stainless steel plate, sheet and coil products. It provides a wide range of products in high performance steels for engineering sectors such as automotive and oil and gas, as well as demanding applications such as architectural cladding and commercial catering equipment.

OSD has a long history of supplying the decommissioning market, providing steel for one-off projects such as Sellafield's six new pile fuel cladding silo doors, and for higher-volume products such as intermediate level waste containers.

"Being part of the waste and decommissioning supply chain means we're used to working with high levels of control over the traceability and integrity of the steels we produce," says Simon Marsden, commercial manager. "When there was the announcement about building new nuclear power stations in the UK, we saw it as a market we wanted to be in."

The group already supplies nuclear new build projects in France, China and the US. "It was a natural progression for OSD in Sheffield to want to be part of the upcoming new build programme in the UK, but we realised that the quality levels and business process requirements in our local processing activities would need to increase even further," Marsden notes.

To make sure the company was ready for new build, the OSD team entered the Fit For Nuclear programme in summer 2015. "We had seen a lot of our customers and competitors going through the same thing, and it was something we wanted to be part of," says Marsden. "It's always good to have an external pair of eyes coming in."

The initial assessment didn't hold any surprises, but did highlight a few areas that the team already realised needed attention. The main area for refinement was around project management. "Our general order book tends to be less project-focused, and more based on ongoing supply relationships with long-established companies," notes OSD technical manager Andy Backhouse. "Managing one-off projects was an area which we knew we wanted to improve for nuclear and for other sectors."

With support from the F4N advisors, the team were able to develop new project management capabilities and pilot them on real orders. A new methodology for business control documentation was developed using a nuclear waste container project, while a new end-of-project lessons-learned process was introduced on the project to provide stainless steel cladding for Birmingham New Street station.



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“We had F4N running in parallel with live project orders, and they came together to give a good outcome,” Backhouse says. “Other industries we work with also sometimes run on a project basis, and all the work we’ve done to improve our project management skills for nuclear will benefit our customers in areas like architecture.”

OSD also focused on delivering nuclear safety training to all of its 100-strong workforce, and helped workshop staff understand the relevance of their work.

The firm was granted F4N status in autumn 2016, and is already reporting benefits in customer engagement.

“We talked about F4N at a recent decommissioning event, and that was really quite attractive to a lot of potential customers,” says Rob Swift, business manager for OSD’s plate service centre. “We have already found a significant requirement for stainless steels in new build and, if we can be part of this programme and increase this business in general, we have a lot to offer.”

To maintain the gains made through F4N, OSD is now embarking on a number of continuous improvement projects including a renewed manufacturing excellence programme, and a value stream mapping exercise for nuclear orders.

“Developers who are building equipment for Hinkley Point realise that the material of construction is a very important part of the project,” says Backhouse. “Material selection, and

having a good material supplier, is a critical part of the supply chain. In nuclear new build engineering codes, there are often specialist requirements for the stainless steel grades that entail bespoke manufacture, and coordination of this at an early stage is beneficial to all. Anyone involved with Hinkley can feel free to come and talk to us directly.”

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Fit For Nuclear (F4N) helps UK manufacturers get ready to bid for work in the civil nuclear supply chain.

F4N
Fit For Nuclear

F4N was developed by the Nuclear AMRC and its leading industrial partners, and has been extensively developed and expanded to meet industry demand. The service lets UK manufacturers measure their operations against the standards required to supply the nuclear industry, and take the necessary steps to close any gaps.

Hundreds of companies have completed the online F4N assessment, with most receiving ongoing support and development from the F4N team of nuclear specialists and experienced industrial advisors.

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