



Case Study

How a Multinational Chemical Manufacturer in the UAE Transformed Its Safety Culture and Operational Performance

“Safety Tops Everyone’s Priority”

In 2013, a multinational chemical manufacturer based in the UAE took a bold step to strengthen its safety culture. Despite a strong foundation built over decades in the Middle East — and involvement in iconic regional projects like Ain UAE and the gold-roofed metro stations — leaders recognised that safety could no longer be treated as a secondary concern behind production and customer service. To move beyond this perception, the company partnered with DEKRA to launch a world-class behavioural safety initiative across its facilities, including its high-performance powder coatings plant in Dubai.

Over the course of a decade, that collaboration evolved into a deep cultural transformation. The initiative not only reduced incidents and strengthened employee engagement, but also significantly improved operational efficiency, quality, and energy consumption — all while fostering innovation and earning global recognition.

▶ A Trusted Brand Facing Familiar Challenges

Known for its premium coatings, the company had long been seen as a leader in performance and quality. The UAE site, with about 80 employees, supplied coatings to critical sectors including aerospace, automotive, marine, and construction.

But a cultural assessment in December 2013 revealed some persistent challenges:

- **Perception gaps:** Workers believed management cared about safety, but still prioritised production and customer service more.
- **Communication barriers:** Multilingual crews and limited supervisor feedback diluted safety discussions.
- **Stalled advancement:** Some employees felt there were limited career growth opportunities, risking long-term engagement.

Despite a solid reputation and a loyal workforce, it was clear that something had to change if the company wanted to become a true global benchmark in both safety and operations.

▶ Catalysing Change Through Behaviour-Based Safety

Recognising that safety performance was both a moral and business imperative, the Regional Managing Director and senior leaders committed to a global rollout of DEKRA’s Behaviour Accident Prevention Process (BAPP®). The UAE plant became one of the first to implement the initiative, which later became known locally as “STEP” — *Safety Tops Everyone’s Priority.*

The launch began with a collaborative **Implementation Design Workshop** (IDW), where employees at all levels envisioned a culture of confident, supported, and safe work.

Key commitments emerged:

- **Employees** would actively report risks and help peers work safely.
- **Supervisors** would lead by example, provide coaching, and recognise safety behaviors.
- **Leaders** would supply the resources and accountability to make it sustainable.

The company didn't just want a program. It wanted a movement.

▶ Implementing STEP: From Insight to Action

The engagement began with DEKRA's **Organisational Cultural Diagnostic Instrument (OCDI)** to surface the cultural factors affecting safety behaviours. That insight shaped the design of the BAPP® rollout and helped identify **critical behaviours** impacting frontline risk.

Although the first appointed facilitator stepped down due to maternity leave, the transition to the HSE & IMS Officer as facilitator was seamless. The site rebranded

the process to STEP, signaling a fresh commitment from the ground up.

Initial safety observations revealed widespread risk areas:

- Improper manual handling and poor pallet storage
- Forklift safety violations (e.g., fork positioning, speeding)

- Unsafe working-at-heights practices
- Respiratory protection issues in high-risk areas

Despite limited prior experience with coaching, employees responded positively. The STEP process introduced coaching feedback loops, robust observation data tracking, and frequent communications through newsletters, safety briefings, and a dedicated board — all reinforcing a cultural shift.

▶ Results That Speak Volumes

Quantitative Success

From 2014 through 2024, the transformation has been striking:

- **2995 LTI-free days** at the site (1950 and counting since the last recorded injury)
- **Only one reportable injury** in over a decade
- **~95% of behaviours** observed are classified as safe
- **OEE improvement from 39% (2018) to 66% (2024)**
- **Customer complaints dropped from 34 (2019) to 12 (2024)**
- **Energy consumption reduced from 28,846 gJ (2018) to 16,981 gJ (2023)**

This performance goes beyond safety metrics — it reflects a deep integration of safety and operational excellence.

Qualitative Transformation

Within the first 12 months, 100% of employees reported working more safely due to STEP, and 93% reported a safer overall site environment. By 2022, the employee engagement score had risen to the **84th percentile**, up from 78th in 2018.

Key infrastructure changes were also made:

- Replaced congested areas with a purpose-built warehouse
- Installed pedestrian pathways and traffic controls
- Introduced vacuum lifting tools to reduce manual handling
- Wrapped all high-stored items to prevent dropped objects
- Upgraded thermal comfort with spot cooling, HVLS fans, and air recirculation

One particularly innovative project involved introducing a **pneumatic transport tubing system** to eliminate repeated stair-climbing. This reduced sample delivery time from 2 minutes to **10 seconds**, while significantly improving safety.

▶ Building a Sustainable Culture

In 2022, the company refreshed the STEP process under the banner of “STEPUP,” using recent incident learnings to refine training, observation techniques, and coach development. Video guides and tailored materials helped frontline employees own the process and coach their peers.

The site has also been recognised multiple times:

- **Three-time Corporate Take Care Award recipient**
- **ALPS Silver Medal in 2023** for continuous improvement excellence (first in the MEA region, sixth globally)
- **Bronze Medal recipient in 2021**

▶ What's Next?

Far from complacent, the site continues to refine STEPUP while exploring new safety innovations, operational improvements, and frontline engagement tools. Leaders see the connection clearly: strong safety practices drive efficiency, quality, and ultimately, business results.

As one site leader put it, "This isn't about checking boxes. It's about making sure everyone — from the forklift driver to the plant manager — gets home safe and proud every single day."





DEKRA

Organisational & Process Safety

DEKRA Organisational and Process Safety are a behavioural change and process safety consultancy company. Working in collaboration with our clients, our approach is to assess the process safety and influence the safety culture with the aim of making a difference.

In terms of behavioural change, we deliver the skills, methods, and motivation to change leadership attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making among employees. Supporting our clients in creating a culture of care and measurable sustainable improvement of safety outcomes is our goal.

The breadth and depth of expertise in process safety makes us globally recognised specialists and trusted advisors. We help our clients understand and evaluate their risks, and we work together to develop pragmatic solutions. Our value-adding and practical approach integrate specialist process safety management, engineering, and testing. We seek to educate and grow client competence in order to provide sustainable performance improvement. Partnering with our clients, we combine technical expertise with a passion for life preservation, harm reduction and asset protection.

We are a service unit of DEKRA SE, a global leader in safety since 1925 with over 48,000 employees in 60 countries and five continents. As a part of the world's leading expert organisation DEKRA, we are the global partner for a safe world.

We have offices throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

www.dekra-uk.co.uk

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