

# A COMMON VOICE



Norman Stevenson (far right) during a recent visit to an anthracite mine in South Wales.

## BOARD MEMBER **NORMAN STEVENSON** DISCUSSES HIS JOURNEY FROM THE MINING INDUSTRY TO HEALTH AND SAFETY.

**W**hen I left school in 1969, I began working in the mining industry. Safety was excellent underground. Hazards were well-known and appropriately controlled, making deep mining, in my opinion, one of the safest industries in the UK. If there was a table illustrating the safest industries in this country, taking into account procedures, the application of those procedures, the management of the hazards, and the safety culture, I would definitely put deep mining at the top. I would

probably put construction at the bottom of the list – although that is the most improved industry in the last 15 years.

In total I worked for British Coal for 20 years, taking a break to work in a mine in South Africa in 1982 – the biggest producing coal mine in the world. During the UK colliery closures in the late 1980s, there was a programme to retrain

ex-mine workers for other industries. It was a natural progression for me to go from production in the mining industry – which was governed by the Mines and Quarries Act – into a health and safety advisory role in any other industry. This was due to the prescriptive nature of the Mines and Quarries Act, which placed statutory duties on people, which focuses the mind and instils the desired culture, whereas the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 places general duties on companies.

### COLLECTIVE GOALS

I have also held positions at Foster Wheeler (Scotland) Ltd, an engineering construction company, and at Tarmac Quarry Products (Scotland) Ltd. I was at Tarmac for nine years when I moved on to the Motherwell Bridge (MB) Group of companies – at the time, the biggest privately owned engineering conglomerate in the UK. The main challenge was achieving commonality within so many companies, all with

different systems and cultures. I set up regular meetings with safety advisors in the group – we called ourselves the National Safety Advisers Forum. Through working together and looking at procedures contained in individual companies, we developed a common safety management system, which was much needed.

I am now the Senior Safety Manager for Robertson Construction, a privately owned group of companies. I started as Safety Manager for two of five construction companies in the group and I now cover all of them. When I joined, the problems were similar in nature to those at MB. Based in Stirling, I oversee three Safety Managers in the group and, as a team, we are introducing commonality.

### KEEPING BUSY

I am also on the management committee for the Safety Health and Environmental Forum (Scotland) (SHEFS). I represent SHEFS on the Scottish Chamber of Safety, the co-ordinating body of the all the occupational health and safety groups in Scotland and am the current Chairman. I am also the vice Chairman of Safety Groups UK, which is the co-ordinating body for all groups in the UK, so I am kept very busy!

Safety has most definitely changed since my mining days. It has become overbearingly bureaucratic. This is made so, predominantly by some so-called safety professionals. I think it is more important to identify problems and generate solutions to those problems than it is to quote breaches in legislation and walk away leaving operatives wondering what you're talking about.

I live in a village in Stirlingshire called Head of Muir, and I do a lot of hill walking – I don't mean English hills, I mean real hills! I walk Munro's (Scottish mountains with heights above 3,000ft, originally listed by deceased mountaineer Sir Hector Munro). There are no such hills in England, but Snowdon in Wales just makes it above 3,000ft. There are just 'wee wet bumps in the ground' in England!

