

# A pint doesn't have to cost the Earth

By Keith Hatch

Union members working for the world's biggest brewer are leading the way in cutting costs and carbon in a project that has seen companies, politicians and fellow trade unionists flocking to Wales to see how it's done.

Next time you go out to the pub, look around, there's a good chance that you or someone near you, will be ordering a drink brewed at the Magor Brewery. The ABInBev brewery near Newport brews 8% of all British beer, including Stella Artois, Budweiser and Bodingtons.

The large scale brewery was recently used for an episode of Dr Who as a Cyberconversion factory floor. It covers 57 acres and employs around 350 people, so it uses a huge amount of resources to produce its range of beers and lagers. In fact, until recently, it used 7,000,000 litres of water and produced 50 tonnes of carbon dioxide each day.

That has all changed though with the help of the union. Unite represents nearly 90% of the workforce and was ideally placed to help the company reduce its carbon footprint, saving a fortune.

Tony Bates is the Unite Branch Chairman, and a Production Technician at Magor. He was instrumental in setting up an initiative that saw the workforce taking the lead in energy saving.

Tony takes up the story: "The original idea started from Unite's Green Workplace initiative. The main driver was a few members who wanted to actively start to do something instead of just talking about it. I

coordinated the start, and it just got up and ran."

The result was Project JUPITER (Join Us People in Tackling Energy Reduction). The project has now been going over two years, and through an initial £1.4 million company investment in the ideas and initiatives put forward by the workforce, the firm recouped its outlay in less than 18 months.



Tony Bates receiving Wales TUC Green Rep of the Year Award from Jane Davidson, Wales Environment Minister

Unite set up a team of Energy Guardians and convened a meeting to look at what energy savings could be made and how they could achieve them. They came up with a set of long-and-short term goals (See Box A). Energy Guardians represent all departments at Magor and now meet monthly. They monitor improvements and examine the work process, looking at possible ways to cut such things as water and energy use. All of this is done with



the involvement of the entire workforce, with Energy Guardians taking forward ideas that come up in their department. This has developed into an energy saving mindset amongst the employees, with the knock on effect of workers taking the message, and money saving ideas, home.

**Box A: Energy Guardians - long and short objectives.**

- Any policy or work practice changes were not to be linked with terms and conditions.
- The need for training and awareness throughout the company.
- Full commitment from all levels of management.
- Getting support through high profile promotion.
- Regular meetings with management.

Since starting the project, the company has seen water usage drop 46%, electricity usage fall 49% and heating bills cut by 23%. In the first two years, the firm saved more than £2 million in bills, and this has been done through a mix of quick wins and a rolling programme of installing energy efficient equipment. Building on this success, the company has invested a further £1.1 million in project Jupiter.

Tony feels one of the most important things in the project was to involve members who were keen at the beginning. "To start with I chose the most positive people with an interest in the environment, that way the team was already highly charged and rearing to go" he says. "The challenge I set was that we needed most of the members' buy in. We pitched it that it was not about saving the company more money, but participating in

securing our children's and grandchildren's future, and also about changing a mindset that saves members' money on their home utility bills."

Tony felt that having the support of management was vital to the project's success. "The management were very involved straight from the beginning and continue to fully support the project, but this is a Unite initiative run by the union," he says "We set up the meetings and chair and invite management along."

"ABInBev has a "Better World" policy so the project fitted right in with that. Also, most employers love pro-active workforces, reducing the carbon footprint goes hand in glove with savings."

The project has now entered its second phase, and is spreading the energy-saving word beyond Magor, into the local business community. It is approaching other companies to establish a Welsh energy coalition aimed at sharing best practice and innovation on energy reduction. A recent event at the plant was attended by 20 local companies and it is hoped they will soon get involved in their own projects.

**Box B: Magor Brewery's three step approach.**

- Step 1. Immediate action: e.g. - quick fixes, thermostats and energy efficient lighting
- Step 2. Evolution: replacing equipment e.g. fridges and laptops with energy efficient versions
- Step 3. Self-sufficiency: explore installation of wind turbines and solar panels

Since Project JUPITER started, regional and national politicians have been beating a path to Magor to see what the union there has done. The reps and members have also been taking the message out of the factory. Tony says the really high point was “our invite to the House of Commons to share our project with Ed Miliband, and our invite to the Welsh TUC conference last year sharing a stand with Unite. The company fully supported that by supplying a bar, stands and sample beer products.”



Magor rep's and management with Ed Miliband

Chris I'Anson, the brewing manager says: “This is a real partnership which aims to achieve improvements in environmental targets and reduce waste. We have a very good working relationship with the union at Magor and share a common goal to reduce our carbon footprint and energy use. We are working together on this project and are now carrying out a study which will last a year to 18 months to see about installing wind power. ”

#### BOX C: Tony's Top Tips

- Find members with an interest in the issues
- Work closely with the workforce to raise awareness and increase involvement
- Make sure it's a standalone initiative
- Ensure meetings are open, inclusive and equal
- Above all: Be positive and take the project slowly

Tony is keen to encourage other unions and branches to work with members of staff to set up similar initiatives. He has even had union enquiries from across Europe and as far away as Canada asking how the project at Magor was achieved.

“I think it's important that they begin slowly and feel their way along, only taking the next step when the membership are ready. Otherwise, if it falls down in the early stages, that's it, it won't fly” he says. “Also we have had great support from both Unite and ABInBev in this project, without that support, it wouldn't have been a success.”

Magor really demonstrates how a union-organised workforce can develop projects that benefit not only their members, but also the company they work for and the wider local community.