

Case study

“Implementing the BRCGS reduces food safety risk.”

Michael Clarke, Head of Quality



Strengthening customer confidence with BRCGS

How Nampak Plastics improved product quality and food safety with the BRCGS standard for Packaging Materials.

The BRCGS Standard for Packaging has now been in print for over a decade, making it the most mature and widely known Packaging Standard in the world. What many people don't realise is that the Standard is unique, having been written 'for packaging, by packaging' using packaging industry expertise from each key area. We spoke with Michael Clarke, Head of Quality for Nampak Plastics Europe, a division which specialises in in-plant packaging supplies on customer premises as well as strategic support site operations for the dairy and juice industries.

Why did nampak choose to become certificated?

There were two major reasons; number one, we were instructed to do so by our customers, who in turn had been instructed to do so by their customers (i.e. retailers into dairies into us, the plastic packaging provider). Additionally, as we had disparate, different systems across all our sites, we were looking for a way to standardise them across sites. The BRCGS Standard for Packaging came just at the right time. Also certificated against other reputed Standards, we treat the BRCGS Standard as the one we give our major emphasis to. It is written much more proscriptively than the others. There are definitely fewer grey areas with the BRCGS Standard for Packaging. It is easier to explain, easier to implement, more black and white. As far as the BRCGS Standard is concerned we have 100% identical implementation. Because our sites are run slightly differently, we do have variations in the way the other Standards are implemented. We meet the clauses of the other Standards slightly differently from site to site, but in the use of the BRCGS Standard there is rigid adherence to a set method. That works very well for us, and gives us the opportunity to compare site against site. What it does mean is that you know you're getting standardisation; it means the customers know that in theory they are getting a product made to the same hygiene Standard.

How did Nampak select a certification body to work with?

We were actually approached by a certification body with some employees who used to work for us, which was great because they knew our business. After a couple of years, once we had the systems firmly in place and understood the certification process, we put all the sites out to tender and went with the one who gave the best offer. They turned our systems inside out, found things that had not been noted before, flagged things up and made us improve. After a few years we moved to a company who were new to the business and challenged us in new areas. We want a certification body which provides value for money, but also has people who are not scared to challenge us.

Did Nampak undertake any training in the standard before implementation?

“In the early days we didn't do any training specific to the BRCGS Standard for Packaging. Senior people in the organisation who had a direct input into the system did Food Safety Management courses. However, later we thought there was a bit of a gap, so senior people right down to first line managers have done training courses specific to the BRCGS Standard for Packaging, delivered by our certification body. We found it very useful. It gives a much more direct correlation between the Standard and what is actually happening in our factories. We will definitely do more training. We have on-going training to get people to where we want them to be in terms of understanding the BRCGS Standard. All of Nampak Europe's sites are located in the UK and all are certificated to the BRCGS Standard for Packaging and any acquisition or building of new sites would address food safety as a priority.



How important is the BRCGS standard for Packaging to your business?

We cannot supply to our major customers without a BRCGS Standards certification. It is like a pre-requisite of us even signing the contract with them. It gives our customers a meaningful idea of what our operating conditions are like and gives them security that we know what we are doing and have implemented meaningful procedures; the BRCGS Standard means something. If you implement the BRCGS Standard, it improves on the number of customer complaints you received, it improves your product quality and food safety and in turn, because of those two things, make your customer happier. Also, it helps to reduce insurance premiums, which is important, because it makes us less risky. It does reduce your food safety risk.

Have Nampak made any major improvements to their sites, any structural or equipment changes that have been directly driven by compliance to the BRCGS Standards; either to make compliance easier to become compliant with any of the requirements?

The big one for us which we really tightened up as a result of the Standard is security; access to site, visitor control, and security. Because we concentrated on the product and the system and environment surrounding the product, and that was one thing we didn't really pick up on. Now we're pretty good at it – there's a barrier, you have to go to Reception to gain access. But all the systems in general have improved just because it highlights the Food Safety element of what we do, which is quite easy to ignore. It's easy to forget there are a whole host of safety issues surrounding the product which the BRCGS Standard forces us to consider, and that's a good thing. The organisation also has a strong commitment towards employee engagement, driven from the top by Managing Director, Eric Collins. Having an engaged workforce has no doubt helped Nampak towards ensuring they are compliant. Our commitment towards encouraging our workforce to be involved in all aspects of its business was recognised when we received the accolade of overall winner in the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) 2010 awards, as well as winning the Employment Engagement Category.

When you receive your audit reports and see what results sites have achieved, do you share that information across your sites so that each can learn from the other?

It is shared with the management teams across the entire business. So we can share conformity and non-conformity. If there are any improvements that come out of the audits they are implemented across all sites. So the failings of one site lead to improvements at other sites.

Would you have any top tips to sites who are thinking about implementing The BRCGS standard for packaging and packaging materials?

Yes, I have a couple. I would say make sure you talk to the BRCGS Standards themselves, who will give you their expert guidance and help you along. Also find a certification body that you can work with, who will challenge you and add value to your business. Internally you must have senior management buy-in otherwise the

whole thing will just fail. You cannot implement it from middle management level downwards; your senior people have to be bought into it. When you're along the journey of implementing it, you need to embed the BRCGS Standard into your company's culture and way of thinking. You can't run it as a system separate to your normal operations, it has to be embedded.

Any pre-audit top tips? A week or so before the audit, are there any top tips to bear in mind?

If you've got ready and you stay ready there shouldn't be any real difference. I would say talk to people, keep them interested. Keep it live and fresh, don't let the system go stale – that is important. We make an effort to do that and we talk about the BRCGS Standards a lot. If you asked people here what Standards we've got I bet they'd say BRCGS Standards and they wouldn't know the others. They should all know the BRCGS Standards – that's the one we give the real push to, because it's the one we'd lose business without if I'm being honest.

Nampak Plastics Europe

Nampak Plastics Europe Ltd. is one of the largest manufacturers of HDPE milk bottles for the UK dairy market. It currently operates nine sites which are spread across the UK including one in Northern Ireland, employing approximately 600 employees. Nampak Plastics is a subsidiary of Nampak Ltd, listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange who employs over 14,000 people in the UK & Africa. Nampak Ltd. manufactures of a diverse range of packaging products in a wide range of technologies - paper, plastic, metal and glass.

Nampak Plastics Europe was formed in 1999 when two well-established UK blow-moulding companies, Plysu and BlowMocan, were merged by South African-owned organization Nampak. Plysu was founded in 1945 and in 1964 that they started blow-moulding rigid containers. Plysu was the first company to launch the 'poly-bottle' in the UK in 1982 – having seen the concept introduced into the American market a few years earlier. BlowMocan was founded in 1976 by ex-Plysu employees who saw a niche in the market. Nampak acquired BlowMocan in 1994 and Plysu in 1999, to form Nampak Plastics Europe. Nampak are committed to being at the forefront in packaging innovation and currently produce the lightest weight HDPE milk bottle – Infini. The bottle achieved international industry recognition, picking up two global awards, the 'Best Dairy Packaging Innovation' category at the Dairy Innovation Awards 2012 and World Star Award 2013.

About BRCS

BRCGS is a leading brand and consumer protection organization, used by over 29,000 suppliers in over 130 countries, with certification issued through a global network of accredited certification bodies. BRCGS Standards' guarantee the standardization of quality, safety and operational criteria and ensure that manufacturers fulfil their legal obligations and provide protection for the end consumer. BRCGS are now often a fundamental requirement of leading retailers, manufacturers and food service organizations.

The BRCGS Standards certification scheme offers comprehensive support to help new and established businesses to achieve and maintain their quality and safety aims.