

# Occupational Safety on a global scale

Every business, large or small, has a responsibility to make sure its staff are protected from any risks while at work, especially if using machinery or specialist equipment. For a corporation like the AL-KO Vehicle Technology Group, which supplies chassis and accessories to the caravan industry around the world, occupational safety becomes a global responsibility

Words John Rawlings

Kötz plant

The World Health Organisation defines Occupational Health and Safety as “an area of work to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations”. This is a subject that the AL-KO Vehicle Technology Group (AL-KO VT), with manufacturing facilities around the

world, takes extremely seriously. It ensures procedures are in place so its employees are protected and continually maintains and invests in its production machinery and processes to ensure the highest standards are always achieved.

### Zero Accident Strategy

“In our company, safety is a top priority,” says Harald Hiller, President and CEO of AL-KO VT. “We want to welcome healthy employees to work in the morning and send them home still healthy in the evening. Our goal is to have zero accidents in the company. We have a Zero Accident Strategy, and it is hugely important that each individual takes responsibility for the issue of safety,” he continued.

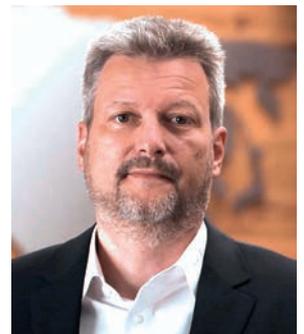
### Investment in equipment and training

To support occupational safety in the workplace, AL-KO VT is continually investing in equipment and training, as detailed by Chief Operating Officer Markus Siegner: “We have regular training and education on the topic of educational safety. We have installed

clear processes and exchange information around the business so we can all learn from each other.”

“We have to make sure that safety is always at the forefront of all our minds. It is precisely when we think ‘oh, it’ll be OK’, or ‘it will only take a moment’ that are crucial. Everyone needs to be alert and cautious even in these seemingly small or unimportant situations,” he continued.

Vice President of EHS (Environment, Health & Safety) Management across the AL-KO VT Group is Markus Betz who says: “We cannot be successful as a company without the highest level of safety in our workplaces. We have clear structures and responsibilities across the com-



Markus Betz,  
Vice President  
of EHS



pany, from top management to the specialists on-site, and we actively encourage works councils, company doctors and employees to be involved in the safety organisation. Safety and the goal of zero accidents are my absolute top priority.”

“Safety and potential risk must be considered at all times, even during work that you may think of as quick or casual. It is often little things or carelessness that can have the greatest impact on occupational safety,” continued Markus Betz.

**Safety focus**

To maintain a constant focus on safety at work, there are regular Safety Stand-Down meetings at AL-KO VT to provide a forum when all staff can exchange ideas on the topic of safety. For example, a whole team will meet with their manager for a Safety Stand-down. This can provide critical feedback from those who use machinery or work in potentially dangerous situations.

“If any accidents or near-misses happen, we have to know about them so we can learn how to avoid any repeat of the situation,” said Markus Betz. “One example is forklift safety and personal protective equipment, especially gloves. Forklifts are important for our operations, but they come with a lot of potential risk of accidents as well, so we have managed this with traffic

management to avoid forklifts meeting pedestrians and ensure their technical equipment is maintained,” Betz continued.

“It cannot be said or emphasised often enough that no matter what time pressure or stress an employee might be under, occupational safety always comes first,” added Markus Betz.

**International responsibility**

The international responsibility for implementing occupational safety standards across the AL-KO VT Group also comes to Markus Betz. This means he has to ensure occupational safety standards are the same across the group which is continually growing through further investments in plants and through acquisitions.

For example, when AL-KO VT acquired the chassis manufacturer, Bankside Patterson, in the UK in 2019, ensuring its occupational safety standards matched those of the rest of the group was an important part of the integration process. This started with an audit of Bankside Patterson’s safety at its UK plant.

**Improved Focus**

Plant Manager at Bankside Patterson, James Sugden, gave us an insight into how the UK management team ensured a 90-day safety plan was executed to ensure its occupational safety quickly matched the same level as AL-KO VT.

“This process was closely supported by Markus Betz and his team. Weekly global health and safety calls soon started that were a great support to us at Bankside Patterson,” said James Sugden.

“These weekly meetings with the team trigger ideas and flows through the workforce, and we’ve found this empowers and allows people on the shop floor to really engage with where they can find solutions. We’ve really found that this has helped with engagement,” added James Sugden.

As a result of this improved focus on occupational health from its integration into the AL-KO VT Group, Bankside Patterson implemented several new safety procedures and identified high-risk areas. For example, it undertook a finger entrapment survey, and it has removed some of the operations where there was a chance of a broken finger or a cut to the hand. This has achieved really good engagement from the blue-collar workforce.

Bankside Patterson has also increased the induction time for new starters.



Harald Hiller,  
CEO



Above: James Sugden, Plant Manager, Bankside Patterson UK



Above: Markus Siegner, COO  
Below: Ettenbeuren plant



This includes going through a formal information and introduction pack.

“This means that when we have people turn up to the site, employees and agency staff alike, they already know the safety standards we expect,” commented James Sugden.

**Ongoing development**

This continuous focus on occupational safety brings obvious benefits to AL-KO VT’s employees and the efficiency of the business. It also means that OEMs and consumers who buy products from AL-KO VT will know they are supporting a professional business that takes the safety of all its staff seriously, wherever they are in the world.