

# Safety first

A conversation about safety with Tim Murray, CEO of Aluminium Bahrain B.S.C. (Alba)  
By **Alex W. Lowery\***

This is the second in a series of interviews on safety related topics with industry leaders. Tim Murray, took the helm of Alba in 2012 and has since had a positive impact on safety not only within his own company but industry wide. From instituting innovative safety campaigns with eye-catching titles such as "Safety Breeze" to travelling the globe promoting safety, Tim and Alba have taken a leadership role in safety in the aluminium industry. Tim has proven focusing on safety has a positive effect not only on the workers but also on a company's bottom line.

## 1. How do you view safety?

In terms of safety I take it very personally. The week before I was appointed CEO, we had our fifth fatality in less than three years. So, the first thing we did was to take over safety directly by terminating a contract with a safety consultant. My view is that you cannot outsource safety. At the end of the day, we as management, as CEO, I feel personally responsible for safety.

## 2. Can you finish this sentence? Safety is important because...

It's the number one thing to me. We want workers to be safe, work safely, go home safely and be safe at home. To me this is people's life. We want workers to go home to their children. We don't want them not to come back from work.

## 3. What's your view on the current state of environmental, health, and safety (EHS) in the global aluminium industry?

From what I have seen, if you look at the environmental procedures and equipment, everything in the new equipment we buy, it's kind of built in. The awareness is there. We recycle almost everything, even with our processes. I think we are almost at 99% in terms of zero waste. Smelters historically had a bad reputation that they pollute and are a dangerous place. People

have gone to great lengths to make sure they are protecting the environment and showing it.

## 4. How has EHS at Alba evolved overtime?

Historically, I think Alba was more of a compliance mind set. We had good systems and processes. The responsibility was not with the line management. This is one of the big changes we made. We had to drive the ownership of safety to the shop floor. So the biggest change for us was the ownership, of taking personal responsibility. That you are responsible for your safety as well as your colleague's safety.

## 5. Can you explain the corporate structure at Alba and why safety reports directly to you?

I believe safety needs to report to the CEO to show the importance and that ultimate responsibility falls on the CEO. If safety reports to another executive it will not have the same level of authority and there are potential conflicts of interest.

## 6. A safe and successful maintenance turnaround requires months – or years – of meticulous planning. How is Alba's EHS personnel involved in the planning process

## for maintenance shutdowns.

In terms of maintenance and shutdowns we have a very clear process, it's not just for major shutdowns. It's for anything, anytime we do work activities. We do a risk assessment as part of the permit to work. An assessment of the area, here are the risks and here are the hazards. Major shutdowns are a bit more involved depending on what the shutdown is. We enforce our safety and our principles on the contractors.

## 7. How does Alba handle protecting outside contractors from hazards in your plants, let alone themselves?

In terms of contractors, this was a very big piece of the push of changing the safety. If you look at Alba, we have 3000 workers and another 600 FTE and contractors. If you look at the contractors you have a whole variety of languages. So if you look at the terms of the principles in our safety, we have translated them into all of the languages. I tell everybody they are Alba employees, they are not contractors. When they are in our plant they are our employees.

## 8. Can you explain how Alba promotes safety to your workers?

The first thing is if you are a new worker,



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you get the orientation. For me, I want safety right here, I want it in front of your face all the time. So with these campaigns that we are doing, I think it is a way to keep the momentum on the safety. I tell people I want safety to be fun. I do not want it to be another part of my job. You should want to do it.

**9. The use of Wise Chem is synonymous to good safety practices in our industry for preventing molten metal explosions. How does Alba learn of new best safety practices?**

In terms of safety practices, we attend the major conferences, where typically there is always an update on technology and safety. Our suppliers come selling their products, and say hey we put this in the new smelter in Ma'aden. Or we did this here. So we are always looking to make improvements. The exposure is through the technical conferences and commercial conferences. There are a lot of papers and you get a lot of feedback after the conferences.

**10. How has Alba dealt with minimising the interaction**

**of moveable equipment and pedestrians?**

Within our plant, as part of the campaign we did do a bit on walkways, handrails etc. At the beginning we assigned a manager, called it special projects of safety. One of his biggest initiatives was the movement of the heavy vehicles particularly liquid metal around the plant. One area we used to let pedestrian cars drive around and as a result of this review we stopped that. It was a big change in the culture for people to think I cannot drive my car through the fastest way to get to wherever. So we spent a lot of time on that. We also widened some roads in our plant.

**11. In terms of safety what are you most proud of within Alba?**

I would say that I am most proud that we have had no fatalities while I've been CEO. If you ask me what is my number one achievement as CEO, that's it.

**12. How does Alba prevent the accumulation of aluminium fines in your facilities?**

We actually recently upgrading line 4 and 5. We are doing a lot of upgrades because they are a bit older and we are creeping

the capacity. Then in terms of the port facilities we obviously try to minimise the amount of dust and fines as we unload. We do not have much spillage in terms of alumina. Again, everything is fairly well integrated into the plants.

**13. How do you view safety over the short-to-medium term in relation to the global aluminium industry?**

In the short term from at least an Alba perspective it was a huge issue, because we were on the wrong path. We were having fatalities; we were having two lost time incidents a month. If you walked into the plant you didn't feel safe. Today I think when you walk in the plant you feel safe.

**14. What does Alba have in store for 2015?**

Number 1 is to work together to achieve zero LTI in 2015. Number 2 is to expect volatile LME prices. Which so far I unfortunately have been correct on.

**15. Will safety always be a priority in the future?**

For sure, for as long as I am CEO and hopefully when I leave it stays. ■



At the beginning of 2015, Alba achieved 5 million hours without Lost Time Injury (LTI) for the first time in 7 years.