



Recruitment Trends In The Waste Industry

Terry Buckel, Managing Director of Astute Technical Recruitment, provides an insight into what is happening within the recruitment market and how you can prepare yourself as either a hirer of staff or as a candidate looking to progress a career within Waste Management.

Background

We are all aware that the necessity to manage waste more efficiently is driving significant growth in the Waste Management industry. Market reports have indicated that our industry will need to employ an additional 50,000 by 2020 – an increase of more than 35 percent. In contrast to this, the wider public sector spending cuts and the commercial recession which has hit many UK manufacturing sectors has meant that many other industries have cut back on employment numbers – leading to many experienced workers looking for new opportunities.

As a hands-on recruitment company, helping many waste management companies recruit for technical, engineering, management, operations and maintenance staff throughout the UK, we can see how these shifting demands are impacting on real-life recruitment challenges. We have highlighted a few of the trends we are seeing – and hope that these insights will help you in your own career development or help your organisation to be more effective in its recruitment this year.

Recycling Demands Technical Process Knowledge

The growth in recycling is undoubtedly putting more demands on facilities to create a more advanced technical process in order to manage waste. Collect and dump has now turned into procure, sort, process, refine and re-sell and, as a result, many MRFs are looking for staff with a technical process understanding and background. We have seen candidates from automotive manufacturing, chemical plants and commercial logistics operations being recruited into technical and managerial positions in our clients. Employers need to look for overall aptitude and transferable skills while candidates need to think of how they can translate their expertise into the waste management sector.

Energy From Waste Is Booming

The significant growth in Energy from Waste facilities means that power generation/power plant knowledge and expertise is becoming a key skill in the waste management sector. Because it has started from such a small base, there are very few candidates with specific energy from waste experience and these individuals are in high demand. Most companies are being flexible to look at candidates from the traditional fossil fuel power generation sector and also individuals with expertise of maintaining and operating control rooms and large boiler fed plant facilities. We have successfully placed candidates from the petrochemicals and marine industry into energy from waste projects. One of the upshots of this skill shortage is that waste management businesses are having to review their salary scales. Team leaders within the gas-fired power generation industry will be earning around £50,000 which is significantly higher than traditional team leader rates within waste management and recycling. Companies need to make sure that they are realistic in their budgeting/forecasting and take advice from recruitment experts when planning Energy from Waste projects.

Lean-Manning Acquires “Can-Do” Multi-Skillers

Most new Energy from Waste facilities are now designed to be operated by as lean a workforce as possible. We have run the recruitment for a couple of these plants (we call it “crewing-up”) and they have workforces of between 30 and 50 staff in total. One of the main results of this lean-manning policy is that all staff – particularly those within operations and maintenance – need to be multi-skilled in several disciplines. It is not enough to be an excellent electrical engineer. You may also need to cover mechanical and instrumentation as well. As well as



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having multiple skills, a proactive, positive and “can-do” attitude is key for many of the new facilities. Down-time is lost money so you will be expected to muck-in and get involved in areas that may not be in your official job description, but need to be covered to keep the facility operating effectively.

Commerciality Increasingly Important

Recycling facilities are now becoming commercial entities – part of investor-orientated corporations whose focus is as much on financial return as it is on customer/public service. These corporations are expecting basic recruits to have numeracy and financial awareness as even shift leaders will need to report on shift performance versus targets, fill out spreadsheets and write reports. Managers need to have budgetary and cost centre management expertise and either they, or even dedicated professionals focussing on procurement and sales, need to have an ability to drive good commercial deals with customers, which plays a more important part of many recycling businesses. A positive side to the commerciality is that many employees now have the ability to increase earnings through bonuses paid on facilities reaching either financial or productivity targets.

Continued Growth And Skill Challenges

On a positive note, the industry looks set for a positive future with an increase in recycling and energy from waste facilities. The general level of education and skills required from the average employee is increasing. Many companies now have graduate intakes and even more are taking advantage of the new apprenticeships program to train and develop new employees. There are good career opportunities available within the sector and individuals who have positive, “can-do” attitudes, a good range of technical skills and a commercial focus are in particular demand. Gone are the days of the industry being perceived at the lower end of the desirability scale and this is attracting fresh, new talent to help drive forward growth and prosperity.

Note: Terry Buckel is managing director of Astute Technical Recruitment Ltd, s leading provider of staff to the power generation, waste management and utilities sectors. www.astutetechnical.co.uk

Next month: A follow-on article giving advice on the job hunting process.