

UNDERGROUND SHAKE UP

London underground is undergoing its most radical shake up since trains first began to run on the Metropolitan line in 1863. Six lines are being privatised as part of the government's bid to reshape London's transport.

The government has drawn up a scheme which will package the tube network in three parts - the sub-surface routes and two sets of deep lines. These will be handed to private operators, which will finance investment and operate infrastructure for 30 years. Train operations will still remain in the public sector under the leadership of London Underground Ltd. The London Underground Ltd. public-private partnership is now underway.

There are 4 consortia bidding for the 2 initial contracts up for tender. The Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines make up the lines for one of these contracts, the other includes Bakerloo, Central and Victoria lines. The sub surface lines, District, Metropolitan and Circle, have also entered the bidding arena. There is a requirement in the tender bid for the lines to achieve ISO 9001:2000 within 15 months of securing the contract.

Safety is of paramount importance in the running of London Underground. The King's Cross disaster led to the creation of a safety and environmental system on par with the North Sea oil rigs. London Underground sets standards, measures them and is proactive in maintaining them.

The biggest environmental challenge to London Underground is the rising groundwater which could affect many of the lines. There are 782 drainage pumps at 252 sites around the underground. The winning franchisee will have to take the consortia to ISO 14001 within 3 years of securing the bid.

NHS EQUIPMENTS ARE OUT OF DATE

More than a third of life-saving NHS equipment has been reported to be dangerously old and in need of replacement, according to the first national audit of hospital machines. A large number of the intensive care and X-ray machines are being used past the recommended safety limits, and some of the machines used in cancer treatment are obsolete.

DENTISTS TO CLEAN UP THEIR ACT

Dentists have been told to sterilise all their surgical equipment in case there is a link in spreading the human form of "mad cow" disease. The Government's leading advisers on bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) said that they believed there was a "theoretical risk" that the fatal human version of the brain disease, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, could be passed on to other patients by using dirty equipment.

DEFECTIVE CAR REPAIRS

According to a report by the Office of Fair Trading, more than a million cars receive defective and sometimes unsafe repairs each year. Shoddy or unnecessary work leads to over a million complaints a year. However, that may be only the tip of the iceberg, because many sub-standard repairs go unreported by motorists who lack the technical knowledge to challenge the quality of work. The study recommends that franchised dealers and independent garages be required to give motorists more advance information about the cost and content of work and take steps to improve staff training.

ROAD FUMES 'KILL THOUSANDS'

It has been recently reported that fumes from traffic and industry kill tens of thousands of elderly and vulnerable people across Europe every year. A study of three countries found that outdoor air pollution was responsible for six per cent of all deaths. If the same figure were applied to Britain, it would be equivalent to 40,000 deaths every year. The report, published in *The Lancet*, investigated the effect of outdoor air pollution in France, Switzerland and Austria. It found that three in every 50 deaths - or 40,000 deaths a year - were triggered by bad air quality. Half of those were caused by traffic fumes. Pollution from traffic also accounted for more than 25,000 new cases of chronic bronchitis and 500,000 asthma attacks. Dr Nino Kunzli of the University of Basel in Switzerland said: "Traffic-related air pollution remains a key target for public health action in Europe."

CLEAN GAS CARS MAY POSE HEALTH RISK

Scientists have reported that cars powered by gas, may be far more hazardous to health than previously thought. Studies have found that gas-powered vehicles produce large amounts of ultra fine particles, which are pollutants linked with breathing difficulties, lung cancer and heart attacks.

CUSTOMER CARE

The Institute of Customer Service (ICS) and training consultancy TMI, recently carried out a survey into the UK's culture of complaints which suggested that although many of the UK organisations say they handle complaints professionally, they could do much better. The report found that the majority of the organisations lacked the ability to deal with complaints. This situation is leading to a decrease in customer loyalty, while the cost of gaining new customers is continuing to rise. The survey says that the complaining customers are investing time and care and effectively money in organisations, because they want to keep using them. They offer the organisations the chance to win back their trust and consolidate their loyalty.

CLEANER PARKS

The London Borough of Brent, with a population of approximately a quarter of a million, is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Europe. Half the area is residential, and some industrial with shopping precincts and schools. Brent Parks Service manages over 1000 acres of parks and public open spaces and is directly employed by the borough. They recently became one of the first in local government to achieve ISO 14001 certification.

INFORMATION SECURITY

The government's focus on e-business has caused the security division of the Cabinet Office to recommend that government departments work towards BS 7799. All government departments are to conduct a gap analysis this year to determine what they need in order to achieve the security standard.

FDIS

The national standards institutes that make up ISO have given a positive vote for the DIS versions of the ISO 9000 revisions which are currently being developed. These documents (ISO 9000, ISO 9001 & ISO 9004) will undergo further revision before they are released as Final Draft International Standard (FDIS) in September 2000 for a 2 month ballot by ISO's members. If the vote is positive, the ISO 9000 revisions will be published before the end of the year.

BS 8800

BSI's proposal that ISO establish a technical committee to transform BS 8800, the British OH&S management system guidelines into an ISO standard has been rejected by ISO. Although, more than half the committee members voted in favour of the proposal, under ISO rules, acceptance of such a proposal requires the approval of two-thirds of the members voting.

STAFF PRIVACY

According to research published by the Industrial Relations Service, most UK companies routinely monitor their staff use of the internet. The findings also revealed that most companies also monitor staff e-mails. In October 2000 all employees are to be given a statutory right to privacy when the Human Rights Act 1998 comes into force, but it is not quite clear how this will affect e-mail and internet surveillance.

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

It has been recently reported that the government-backed Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has stated that the Master of Arts degree from Oxford and Cambridge University cannot be described as an academic qualification as it is not awarded as a result of any programme of study or research. A survey conducted recently also showed that most of the employers thought that the degree indicated postgraduate achievement whereas in fact, it can be bought for a small fee after a student is awarded a BA.

WASTE AND RECYCLABILITY STANDARDS

Five new standards have been announced by the European Committee for Standardisation. These are intended to help in the reduction of waste and to promote recyclability.

- EN 13427** requirements for the use of European Standards in the field of packaging waste
- EN 13428** requirements specific for manufacturing and composition - prevention by source reduction
- EN 13430** requirements for packaging recoverable by material recycling
- EN 13431** requirements for packaging recoverable in the form of energy recovery,

including specification of minimum interior calorific value.

EN 13432 requirements for packaging recoverable through composting and biodegradation, a test scheme and evaluation criteria for the final acceptance of packaging.

The standards are the first in the environmental field to follow the principles of the 'new approach', which by legislation is limited to 'essential requirements'. Directive 94/62/EC is a trade-off between increased recycling and guaranteed free movement of goods.

BREAD BAKED TO ISO 9002 STANDARDS

A major bakery in the Midlands, which is probably the largest in Europe, has now achieved ISO 9002. The site operates on a set of fundamental standards which were laid down as part of the implementation process. The in-built monitoring means that the bakery can continually improve systems and increase customer and consumer satisfaction.

BS 8888

BS 8888 was launched in the summer and affects the defining, specifying and graphic representation of products. BS 8888 unifies various recently implemented ISO and EN ISO standards, although it is not intended to take the place of ISO standards. With this guidance, it is expected that UK designers, manufacturers and verifiers will become familiar with the new ISO standards. As well as the preparation of technical drawings, the new standard includes more recent forms of representation and definition, such as digital product definition (3D modeling). The standard also confirms the use of the comma as the only decimal marker.

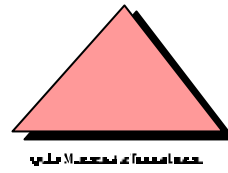
DIARY DATES

10-12 October 2000	Scottish Manufacturing & Engineering Show Contact: SECC, Glasgow 01923 690662
18 October 2000	4 th See Convention Contact: Farnborough Aerospace Centre 01763 271209
19 October 2000	Uncertainty of Measurement - Workshop Contact: Brunel University 01895 203224
25-26 September 2000	Incineration of Municipal Waste Contact: University of Leeds 0113 233 2494

Contacting QM&T

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