



# Awards 2013 Case Study

Award Winner

## SME of the Year

Phoenix Asbestos Recovery Ltd

It is a sobering thought that asbestos is the single greatest cause of work-related deaths in the UK, responsible for the loss of 4,500 lives each year.



Its use was banned in 1999 and in recent years, in response to the dreadful suffering of those affected by contact with the substance the handling of asbestos has become one of the most highly regulated processes in the construction industry.

But with a total commitment to health and safety that goes far beyond legal requirements, and a desire to see its efforts benefit the industry as a whole, Phoenix Asbestos Recovery is a business that sets a standard for others to follow.

It is the Swansea-based company's approach to best practice, innovation and collaborative working that attracted the attention of judges who awarded it the CEW Award for SME of the Year 2013. It was clear to them that Phoenix has not just embraced collaborative working as a commitment to creating a more sustainable Wales, but has taken these values to the core of its ethos.

The business was established in 2002 by Mike Parker and American national Bob Bell, as a sister company to Phoenix Environmental Services Limited. Robert's experience in the US included 6 years in the military on nuclear submarines, followed by 10 years in environmental consultancy conducting decontaminations of nuclear facilities and pharmaceutical research facilities, which included asbestos clear-ups.

After arriving in Wales and joining Phoenix Environmental 14 years ago, he and Mike noted that a great deal of asbestos work was being sub-contracted to a company based in Manchester. That company became the inspiration for Phoenix Asbestos which now employs 24 staff and deals with around 2,000 contracts a year, from small domestic properties to projects worth up to £3m and lasting 2-6 months.

Phoenix takes an active role in encouraging clients and contractors to raise their health and safety awareness and helping them comply with government environmental strategies and legislation. They take a proactive approach to safety within their own organisation and are working toward accreditation for their internal quality standard which has been developed to comply with ISO 14001 and ISO 18001.

They have worked collaboratively with dozens of organisations including councils in Caerphilly, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, as well as South Wales Police, University of Wales Swansea, Cardiff University, Biffa Environmental, M.O.D and many construction companies.

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Bob Bell

Phoenix Asbestos Recovery Ltd

Their desire for transparency between their operations, customers, the HSE and their own staff led to the investment in state-of-the-art technology that permits live links to all their asbestos removal jobs, enabling all stakeholders to view the work in real time.

The benefits of this are manifold, explains Bob: “We want to make the work as safe and seamless as possible. The cameras allow us to view what is happening on site, view potential problems and give guidance remotely, when necessary.

“It is more environmentally friendly for us, as we don’t have to drive to sites so often, and the same applies to the HSE, increasing the number of jobs they can view but reducing their travelling time and costs.”

Bob is happy to admit that investment in such technology doesn’t always make them the cheapest option but he is convinced they are the safest. And, if they feel a potential client is putting time considerations before safety, they will turn the job down on moral grounds. “We try to be profitable, like everyone else,” he said. “We all have to make a living but we want everyone to go home with all their fingers and toes intact. Safety is 100% paramount.”

Exemplary staff training is an essential component of this safety culture. All have taken their regulatory courses in asbestos handling, but once they join the company they are trained in the ‘Phoenix way’. The training facility at the business’s Gorseinon headquarters includes a mock-up of a residential property and every asbestos removal situation they can think of. Their emphasis is on meticulous planning and careful execution, rather than rushing into a job ‘like a bull in a china shop’ only to be faced with days of clearing up.

The business is typically looking two or three steps ahead of any developments in asbestos legislation and is currently finalising approval for an asbestos waste transfer station. Its aim is to manage the disposal of the material more efficiently, considerably reducing its carbon footprint by bulk storing it and driving it to a disposal facility just once a week, ensuring the sustainability agenda is at the forefront of its activities.

Nominating Phoenix Asbestos Recovery for the award, the City and County of Swansea’s Corporate and Building Property Services department observed: “Phoenix is an example of an SME that has innovative ideas, drive and vision to respond to continual changes to environmental, legislative and customer demands.

“Their activities are contributing to a more sustainable Wales by safely managing legacy waste. Their approach to managing this waste responsibly is lessening the impact on the environment and preserving the countryside for future generations to enjoy.”

Bob Bell’s response is very straight forward: “I want to sleep well at night knowing we have done the most we possibly can to create a safe environment. Our ethos is if you are going to do it, do it right or not at all. We’ve stuck by that.”