

COMPANY:
Varsity Contractors, Inc.

HEADQUARTERS:
Pocatello, Idaho

EMPLOYEES:
4,600 (3,900 FTEs)

SERVICE AREA:
All 50 United States, 3 Canadian Provinces

SERVICE MARKETS:
Education, financial, high-tech, manufacturing, hospital, retail and commercial facilities



CIMS Certification: Upholding Varsity’s Standard of Excellence

When your customer is spread across more than half of the United States, and your cleaning crews may be asked to work in one state today and another tomorrow, ensuring everyone in the organization is on the same page is necessary to make certain that service delivery remains consistent and a high performance level is maintained at each account’s location.

That is exactly the challenge faced by Greg Hoch, regional manager of Varsity Contractors’ Ensign Division, based in Salt Lake City, which has a unique “territory.” His only client is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has more than 400 stand-alone sites across the country. Each individual site requires daily service, as well as occasional project work, such as deep carpet cleaning, that is performed by more than 30 traveling service teams.

Given such day-to-day challenges, when Hoch was asked to participate on the Varsity Contractors’ team that would be responsible for preparing the organization to become the first building service contractor to certify to the new ISSA Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS), he felt a bit of initial trepidation concerning what the task would entail. But, after reviewing CIMS and considering the process, he quickly saw great value in its benefit to his region.

“Because of the CIMS assessment, we were able to strengthen our standardization, and update policies that had evolved but might not have been on paper,” says Hoch, noting that the environmental and safety elements of CIMS were of particular interest given Varsity’s commitment to the environment as well as worker health and safety.

“From a risk management standpoint, we found a lot of areas where we could improve our overall communication by using email, regional meetings and training and saw great value in using such communication methods to filter information to front-line employees,” says Hoch. As a result of Varsity’s CIMS process, policies that were updated or documented are now available to all staff through the internal Varsity University Reference Center, and new practices are utilized, such as including safety tips with paychecks.

“It’s harder to identify the actual savings that flow from avoiding problems than it is to identify the direct benefits associated with reducing existing ones, because you don’t know what would have happened,” says Hoch. “But we like to think that the increased awareness and our effort in improving our risk management methods will pay short- and long-term dividends by even further minimizing the chances that something could happen in our operations.”

The process of complying with CIMS and working to achieve certification also proved valuable to Tyson Lee, support center manager at Varsity, and the person responsible for leading the Varsity team. “It was good for me, as a person who manages a central communication hub for the entire company, to see where the rubber meets the road in operations after we’ve set and communicated policies.”

What Lee discovered was that after policies and procedures are defined, management can benefit greatly from investigating how information is filtered through the entire organization and analyzing whether the decisions made are effective.

“I realized that we can do things differently in some areas at the corporate level to help operations best implement the directives we’ve set. You truly need effective communication across all organizational boundaries for a company to be successful and well managed.”

“ For years, I have envisioned a certification that went beyond the individual designations previously available in our industry – a certification that applied to a company in general. CIMS certification identifies those organizations that are most professional and should be the first considered by customers to serve them. ”

~ Arlo Luke,
Co-Founder and CEO,
Varsity Contractors

**BEST TIP
FOR COMPANIES
THINKING ABOUT
CERTIFICATION:**

Email as much documentation to the assessor as you can so they can use the on-site assessment to hone in on the areas they still have questions about and have time to give you valuable feedback.

At the same time, Lee emphasizes the need to have a complete feedback loop from operations to determine if policies are fully understood and effective when put into practice. "The assessment helped us ask necessary questions and determine what needed to be modified to produce better results."

To prepare for the CIMS assessment, Lee held weekly meetings with various operations personnel from multiple states and internal support departments, and led the team in conducting a full gap analysis against the Standard's elements.

Once policies were documented, updated and reviewed in the field, the company forwarded the information to their accredited, third-party CIMS assessor in anticipation of the on-site review. The comprehensive assessment involved visits to customer accounts in various locations to review how well Varsity's policies are communicated and implemented in the field.

Employees weren't given any warning of the visits and some were nervous when the assessor arrived, but were told to speak candidly, even if they didn't know the answers to the assessor's questions.

"That helped us get honest feedback regarding what our employees knew, and allowed us to discover a need for more clarity in some areas, such as our bloodborne pathogens protocol. We were then able to quickly hone in on ways to improve understanding and communication," says Hoch.

"I admit I had visions of an OSHA-type inspector coming in with a confrontational attitude, but our assessor was very knowledgeable about the issues we face in this business and was consultative in his observations," says Lee. He also learned that sending as much documentation as possible prior to the on-site visits allowed the assessor to quickly identify operational compliance in many areas and hone in on those where questions remained.


"You could see that even if he didn't spend much time on something, he was very alert and knew what to look for," adds Lee. "At one account, he pointed out some dust on top of a refrigerator as the only item he could find to improve, and jokingly reminded us that he was paying attention to all the details, big and small."

What does holding this new distinction now mean for Varsity? Co-founder and CEO, Arlo Luke, sees CIMS as a strong tie-in to achieving the company's mission: "To reward our customers, employees and owners with a secure, exciting and satisfying life by being "THE STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE" in the entire facilities services industry.

"For years, I have envisioned a certification that went beyond the individual designations previously available in our industry – a certification that applied to a company in general. CIMS certification identifies those organizations that are most professional and should be the first considered by customers to serve them," says Luke. "Excellence is the way we operate, the way we treat others, and we feel ISSA is a major partner in the industry if they are going to set a standard for excellence. So we wanted to be the first to achieve it."

The LDS Church was happy to learn about Varsity's new CIMS Certification. "It gives them an added level of comfort when they hear that there is a national recognition that goes along with this designation," says Hoch.

Varsity also has made CIMS a significant part of its recent corporate meeting (held every 18 months) to show employees what the company has achieved and how it can be used to foster further improvements.

"There is something powerful that happens within your organization when the people perceive being part of a company that seeks the higher ground, as well as an environment of growth, opportunity and advancement," says Luke. 

About CIMS:

CIMS is the first comprehensive management and operations standard for cleaning organizations. Administered by ISSA and the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, CIMS is a standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

The CIMS framework is built around five quality principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of well-managed, successful cleaning operations:

- Quality Systems
- Service Delivery
- Human Resources
- Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship
- Management Commitment

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for ISSA, explains: "Implementation of the Standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes. Professional, customer-centered cleaning organizations finally have a touchstone resource, a common rallying point around which all members of the industry can gather and work toward achieving an unprecedented level of professionalism and excellence."

ISSA[®]

The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association

For more information contact
800-225-4772 or visit
www.issa.com/standard.