

From silver to gold: Ironsides Lubricants' decade of building a stronger safety culture

Neil Cork, Operations Director, Ironsides Lubricants

Ironsides Lubricants has been awarded the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' (RoSPA) Health and Safety Gold Award 2026, recognising more than a decade of continuous work to develop a mature, proactive and inclusive safety culture, and marking a significant milestone in the company's ongoing commitment to health, safety and employee wellbeing.



The achievement follows five consecutive RoSPA Silver Awards between 2021 and 2025, and represents the culmination of more than a decade of continuous improvement.

RoSPA's 2026 results confirm Ironsides Lubricants among this year's Gold Award winners, an accolade reserved for organisations demonstrating a very high level of performance and outstanding risk control. Widely recognised as a benchmark for health and safety excellence, the awards assess organisations on both performance and the effectiveness of their management systems.

For Ironsides, the Gold Award represents far more than a certificate. It reflects a culture of accountability, employee engagement and continuous improvement that supports workplace safety, operational reliability, quality standards and service consistency.

For Ironsides, however, the real achievement lies in the journey behind the award.

A decade of cultural change

Looking back over the last ten years, the most significant change has not been one individual project or initiative. Instead, it has been the steady development of employee engagement, safety awareness and confidence in reporting concerns and driving improvements.

Stephen Williams, Operations Manager at Ironsides Lubricants, has been closely involved throughout that journey.

"For me, safety culture is about people looking out for themselves and each other, not just following rules because they have to. Everyone needs to feel comfortable speaking up, raising concerns and learning from mistakes."

That philosophy has helped drive meaningful change across the business.



Stephen Williams, Operations Manager at Ironsides Lubricants, receiving the company's RoSPA Health and Safety Gold Award 2026 in London.

Housekeeping standards, personal protective equipment (PPE) compliance and investment in both people and assets have continued to improve, while the QSHE function has evolved to support the business's growing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) responsibilities.

More importantly, safety has moved beyond being viewed solely as a compliance requirement.

Today, employees are increasingly comfortable identifying hazards, reporting near misses, challenging unsafe situations and suggesting improvements. That shift in mindset is perhaps the clearest indication of how far the business has progressed.

For customers, this matters because strong safety cultures are often linked to strong operational disciplines. The same attention to detail that reduces risk also supports process consistency, quality standards, equipment reliability and continuous improvement throughout the organisation.

From silver to gold

Ironsides' RoSPA journey provides a clear measure of that progress.

The company achieved Silver Awards in 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, establishing a strong record of health and safety performance before targeting Gold in 2026.

The progression was never about achieving a particular score or producing a stronger submission. It was about demonstrating that the culture, systems and behaviours across the organisation had matured to a level capable of sustaining a higher standard. "The Gold Award was something we specifically targeted for 2026 after achieving five previous Silvers," said Stephen.

"When the result came through, there was a real sense of pride, not just in the award itself, but in what it represented. It was the accumulation of QSHE efforts over the last decade and the commitment of the entire team."

The award serves as independent recognition of the long-term commitment shown by employees across every department.

The role of Pawel Pikula

A particularly important part of that journey has been Pawel Pikula, Risk and Compliance Manager, who joined Ironsides as QSHE Manager in February 2019.

When Pawel joined, the business already had a strong foundation, but significant opportunities remained to further develop systems, processes and accountability.

One of the most important changes he helped introduce was a shift in ownership.

Rather than health and safety being viewed as the responsibility of one department, accountability has increasingly been embedded throughout the operation. Audit responsibilities, inspections and environmental activities have been distributed across departments, helping integrate safety into daily operational management.

This reinforces an important principle: QSHE supports and coordinates safety, but everyone has a responsibility for maintaining it.

Pawel also led and coordinated the company's successful 2026 RoSPA submission.

His contribution has strengthened visual management, site communications, training programmes and the integration of health, safety and environmental requirements into operational procedures.

Training has been another major area of focus, with high-quality content and delivery developed internally to support employee understanding and engagement. "Pawel's contribution has been fundamental," said Stephen.

"The Gold Award would not have been achieved without his efforts, coordination and communication. Pawel has played a huge part in developing and maintaining the safety management system and helping embed responsibility throughout the business."

Safety owned by everyone

The strongest safety cultures cannot be created by a QSHE department alone.

At Ironsides, production, engineering, warehouse and office teams are all actively engaged in health and safety. Employees regularly report hazards and near

misses, challenge unsafe situations and contribute ideas that improve the workplace.

One example came from Paul Cooke, Transport Manager, who identified an opportunity to improve visibility around forklift truck movements. This led to the introduction of blue-light floor projection systems on reversing forklift trucks (FLT), providing an additional visual warning for employees working nearby.

While relatively simple, it reflects a culture where employees feel empowered to identify risks and implement solutions. It is this type of engagement that demonstrates the difference between having safety procedures and having a genuine safety culture.

The company's approach has also broadened over time. Areas such as mental health awareness, wellbeing and employee support are now recognised as important aspects of the overall health and safety agenda.

At the same time, Ironsides has demonstrated that continuous improvement sometimes requires difficult decisions. Equipment associated with processes involving products later reclassified as hazardous has been removed where the risk was no longer considered acceptable.

These decisions reflect a long-term commitment to doing the right thing, even when it requires investment and change.

A team achievement

The main 2026 RoSPA Health and Safety Awards ceremony took place in London during RoSPA's 70th anniversary year, bringing together organisations recognised for excellence in workplace safety and continuous improvement.

Stephen attended to collect the award on behalf of Ironsides. For him, however, the achievement was always about the people behind it.

"It felt like the formal recognition of a culture improvement journey coming to its pinnacle," Stephen said.

"While it's personally rewarding to be part of something that has achieved such a high standard, my first thought was of the wider team and the journey

Ironsides has taken. Collecting the certificate was really about representing everyone who plays a part in making our site safe every day. While the certificate carries the Ironsides name, the achievement belongs to the employees who have helped make safety an integral part of how the business operates."

Gold is recognition, not the finish line

There is no intention at Ironsides to treat the Gold Award as the end of the journey. The objective now is simple: maintain Gold and continue to improve.

Health and safety performance, incident trends, employee engagement and key performance indicators will continue to be monitored, with continual improvement remaining a core business objective.

Future plans include strengthening QSHE resources, developing people and identifying new opportunities to enhance safety, wellbeing and operational performance.

For customers, that commitment provides reassurance that Ironsides remains focused on investing in its people, systems and processes, not only to maintain high safety standards, but also to support the reliability, consistency and service quality expected from a long-term supply partner.

As Stephen puts it:

"To me, the Gold Award reflects years of hard work towards creating a safe and supportive workplace. It's not just recognition of our safety standards; it's recognition of the people who live and deliver them every day. The commitment and accountability shown by our teams is what has made this possible. Our people are at the heart of the business, and this achievement belongs to everyone who plays their part in looking out for one another."

From five consecutive Silver Awards to Gold in 2026, the journey demonstrates what can be achieved when safety becomes more than a set of procedures. It becomes part of the culture. And for Ironsides Lubricants, that culture helps create something every customer values: a safer, stronger and more dependable business.

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