

Success in Operations

Carlinville manufacturer achieves ISO 9001:2015 certification and sees improvement in work culture, customer satisfaction, and their bottom line

Area Diesel Service, Inc.



48 Employees



Carlinville, Illinois



areadieselservice.com

SITUATION

Area Diesel Service, Inc. has supplied quality products and services to the diesel market for over forty-five years. After learning about the benefits of becoming ISO 9001 certified in 1993, Area Diesel knew it would be an advantageous path for them to take. However, no one on staff could seem to find the time to devote to pursuing certification.

It wasn't until one of their valued customers was acquired by a larger entity, who was ISO 9001 certified and required the same of subsidiaries and their suppliers, that the commitment to ISO certification re-emerged. To comply, that customer audited Area Diesel, and sadly, they failed. Not because of the quality of their products and services, but because none of it was documented, meaning they had no records of their quality processes. As a result, this customer had to resort to only continue doing business on a provisional and limited basis – unless Area Diesel became ISO 9001 certified.

Fast forward to three years later when Quality Systems Manager, Linda Leefers, came onboard at Area Diesel. She began the process of implementing some of steps required by the standard at that time, which was ISO 9001:2008. After a lot of heavy documentation, they were ready for their second audit. This time they passed, but the company still required Area Diesel to become ISO certified. Leefers remembers, “I got to a point where we were getting close, but we just couldn't get over the hump. I just didn't feel we were ready or that we could pass a certification external audit, and I didn't want us to fail. I wanted us to pass and I wanted us to pass with flying colors.” Leefers and her team realized that in order to achieve the certification they needed a change in mindset. Not only keeping up with quality records but also embracing ISO standards as an intrinsic part of their culture. Area Diesel knew they could not do it on their own, so they called on IMEC to help ease the burden and move forward in their journey.

SOLUTION

With guidance and assistance from helping hands at IMEC, Area Diesel was able to get over that hump and achieve the current ISO 9001:2015 standard certification. IMEC began the process by establishing where Area Diesel was at the time, then identifying and setting personal and departmental goals for the company to move forward on the ISO certification path.

The next step required matching with a registrar to register as ISO certified. One thing that Leefers knew they wanted in a registrar, was “somebody that's going to be a good fit.” Being a small company with less than 50 employees who wear multiple hats, she wanted a registrar that understood and worked with small businesses. IMEC was able to provide a list of registrars they could vouch for – ones they had worked with or were referrals from companies that had positive experiences working with them. Leefers was grateful. “That was extremely helpful, and IMEC did match us with a registrar who we worked well with.”



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As they continued their ISO journey, Area Diesel encountered a major hiccup that needed to be remedied in order to move forward successfully. They realized their years-old business operating software was not going to suffice because it did not have a CRM that was robust enough to meet the current needs. As a result, they hit pause to install a brand-new business operating software that would meet expectations, and that meant everyone had to prioritize learning the ins and outs of the new software. Leefers stated, “this project took longer than the initially signed agreement to work together towards getting certification, but everybody was very understanding; they understood that it was going to take some time to for us to get up to speed with the new software. But that’s ok – in the end we were successful”

It wasn’t an easy road, but Leefers and her team persisted. Even though the process took longer than anticipated, the team sees that as a positive. “I think that by it taking us a little bit longer, it really got some of the ideas ingrained in our daily work to become habits that I think will play out to be advantageous to us in the long run,” said Leefers.

RESULTS

Registering as an ISO 9001:2015 certified company has resulted in many positives for Area Diesel. One major impact is the cultural change and mindset shift of the employees. Instead of approaching tasks as a checklist of things to get done, they understand that they are performing to meet a customer’s needs. Customer satisfaction is in the forefront of every employees’ mind. They now capture levels of customer satisfaction – the great and not so great. This allows them to have conversations about what went wrong and how to prevent it from recurring. Leefers shared that “this has led to a positive change on our outlook; instead of being reactionary, we’re being proactive on everything.”

Area Diesel has not only been keeping impeccable records as far customer complaints and nonconforming products, but also records of all their suppliers. They’ve noticed a positive change in how suppliers respond to them: “It’s been very interesting. Whenever you talk to a supplier and you actually have data in hand to discuss with them – you’ve got proof; so when you say you’re having this issue with this part number, then they really do take you seriously and they really do start to listen.” For Leefers, having hard facts as a result of documentation has worked in their favor on more than one occasion, whereas before the conversation may have been dismissive.

To maintain the momentum of keeping quality dossiers, Area Diesel has started keeping records of their increased company-wide trainings and continue to improve documentation of new products and new part numbers. From Leefers observation, “It seems like because we are keeping better records and holding people accountable, initiatives don’t just fall off from lack of attention paid to them. It’s just been very positive and I think it will continue to do so - it keeps everything in the forefront for everybody and nothing gets put on the back burner because there’s a fire to get put out.”

As word continues to spread to the larger market that Area Diesel is ISO certified, Leefers expects it to broaden their market share. She states, “When we start going to tradeshow again, we will have our ISO 9001:2015 certification displayed, and people that would normally pass us by will stop and say ‘maybe we can take a look, and maybe we can do business with you because you satisfy our requirement to have our suppliers ISO certified and you are. So, let’s talk.’”

- Anticipated New Sales: \$100,000
- Anticipated Retained Sales: \$161,000
- Jobs Created: 1
- Jobs Retained: 47
- Investments in Workforce Practices/Employee Skills: \$5,000
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Improved work culture

“ IMEC’s knowledgeable and useful assistance was instrumental in Area Diesel Service’s ISO9001:2015 certification registration ”
– Linda Leefers, Quality Systems Manager –Area Diesel Service

