SABIC’s UK plant makes dramatic turnaround
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After nearly 20 years of under-investment, SABIC UK Petrochemical’s ethylene liquefaction plant on Teesside has witnessed a dramatic turnaround and is on track to make productivity gains of more than £10 million a year, following an intensive reliability program with change management specialists, Reliable Manufacturing.

Saudi-owned SABIC is one of the world’s largest manufacturers of chemicals, fertilizers, plastics and metals. Its Teesside plant forms an integral part of its European operations.

Just 18 months after embarking on its manufacturing excellence program with Reliable Manufacturing, plant breakdowns and performance issues have been dramatically reduced. Communication between the plant’s two sites has improved, saving the company more than £1 million a year; asset care improvement teams have uncovered issues making great efficiency savings, which on just one propylene dryer is estimated to be in excess of £400k a year. And the plant has set a precedent for the rest of SABIC.

“We’ve managed to achieve reliable production week after week, despite the plant’s age and without any significant investment,” says Wayne Alexander, former senior operations manager. “It’s about the teams operating the plant correctly, being slick at what they do, and working to plans and targets.”

The previously disenfranchised workforce has really got behind the project, with an estimated 75 percent of process team members involved in some way. “When people start to see changes happening, they begin to have more pride in the assets; it increases their motivation and has an indirect effect on performance,” says John Burluraux, manufacturing excellence project manager.