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Interview with James Edley Subadra Consulting Ltd

By Brian Humm, Bulletin Editor

Hi James and thank you for agreeing to be my latest victim for the Bulletin interview, firstly could you introduce yourself to our members?

I've worked here at Subadra Consulting for nearly twenty years now. I started as one of our drilling team and worked my way up to company Director. It's been a fun and challenging process. Prior to starting work I obtained my BSc from Sheffield University in Microbiology and an MSc in Environmental Science from Cranfield University. In addition to input on company strategy and developing links with new clients, my main day-to-day tasks include looking after our fuel industry clients, managing some of the larger and more complex site investigation and remediation projects, and managing our growing team of consultants.

Thank you. Now could you describe the role that you and your company undertake within the fuelling industry?

Subadra was set up back in 1993 to service the retail petroleum industry, primarily specialising in the environmental investigation and remediation of filling station sites. We get involved in the assessment of contamination liabilities or establishing baseline conditions during property transactions, incident response works and, increasingly, dealing with environmental planning conditions during redevelopment of sites. Whilst we have diversified over the years into airports, fuel depots and general brownfield



land, hydrocarbon contamination remains our key area of expertise and still forms a high proportion of our workload. I'm sure we have worked for many of your members over the years.

So, how many operatives do you have within your company?

We have historically kept numbers to around 20 people. This includes our environmental and geotechnical consultants, our drilling team and specialist hydrocarbon laboratory staff.

Does this mean that the team carry out desktop studies and physical remedial work?

Yes. It's a little clichéd, but we really do offer a one-stop-shop when it comes to the investigation of contamination issues at filling station sites. We are an extremely 'hands on' company and own and operate our own drill rigs, remediation equipment and hydrocarbon testing laboratory.

Whilst we generally start with an initial desk-top study, every site is different and the client's primary requirements may vary. Generally we're either retained to quantify potential environmental liabilities as part of a site sale (allowing the all important price negotiation!) or we're tasked with addressing planning conditions imposed on a redevelopment scheme. This could be on a site by site basis, or looking at portfolios of properties on a risk ranking basis.

We design and undertake site investigations using our own drilling rigs (we own a range of equipment to tackle all site conditions), analyse the recovered soil/groundwater samples in our own lab

and complete any required assessments works in-house. If needs be, we can then design and implement a suitable remedial strategy. The fact that we do the site work means we're generally more engaged with the sites we work on. I still surprise clients when they discover I have completed the site works myself - but it does mean I really understand the issues and how to resolve them.

So, what is the furthest area that your team has had to travel?

In terms of the UK...where there is a filling station we're probably been there! We have investigated over 3000 fuel sites over the years. In 2018 we visited sites ranging from the Isle of Skye, Dolgellau (West Wales), Penzance, Margate and Northern Ireland. Personally, just prior to Christmas, I was overseeing the drilling of a 45m geotechnical borehole in a basement off Park Lane in London - not so glamorous, but we got the job done.

Whilst we generally concentrate on the UK market we have been known to tread as far afield as Israel, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, China and Russia and even St Helena!

Have you any interesting jobs that you have had to fulfil over the years?

Whilst we have a wide variety of interesting projects, for the most part, our clients are naturally not that keen for us to share the information as a marketing mailshot!

However, some of our more complex and challenging projects included a 650 borehole investigation at Heathrow (which overall saved the client several hundred thousand pounds in in-situ

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remediation and soil disposal costs); investigating 60 sites in six weeks as part of an oil company divestment (we love a challenge); and remediating a former gas works (pretty nasty that one).

There was also a filling station investigation in south Wales where we found a small hamster in a drain pipe, who we adopted.

So, as a member of the APEA, do you personally think that companies that operate fuelling storage systems are aware of their responsibilities environmentally? And do you think that more should be done to promote environmental awareness in our industry as a whole?

That's a good question. We have seen a significant increase in environmental awareness over the years and we've been involved in several risk ranking exercises recently. The major oil companies used to lead the way in good environmental practices. However, we are now seeing the majority of clients, ranging from single site operatives to some of the new 'super-independents', engage with environmental protection.

The primary driver for this is to prevent environmental impact (the 2017 fine passed down to Tesco certainly made a few sit up and take notice!), but there are many other factors that feed into this equation. For example, in simple terms, if a site is leaking fuel, that's fuel the operator can't sell to their customers! Mitigating reputational loss is also becoming a higher priority for an increasing number of our clients.

One thing we have noticed over the last 10 years, with the more

wide spread adoption of real-time wet-stock monitoring, double skin tanks and lines with interstitial monitoring and more regular tank and line testing, is a marked reduction of serious environmental issues relating to high volume fuel releases. The majority of our remediation work now relates to sites that have low level leaks that have perhaps gone unnoticed for many years (as the loss rate is too small to pick up from wet-stock monitoring or integrity testing).

The one area of improvement we'd recommend would be to follow the model of risk ranking properties. It pays to know which sites could pose the most significant risk in terms of environmental impact and is a fairly low cost exercise. The information obtained can be used to prioritise capital investment or redevelopment programs - and this could lead to long term financial benefits in terms of reducing insurance premiums.

Great, now I would like to know what interests you have outside of the Petroleum world; what do you like to do to relax?

With two young boys relaxation is not something I get a lot of when not at work. However, I did manage to get to Slovenia for a week's whitewater kayaking last Spring, Brittany with the family for some beach fun, and living on the edge of the Chilterns I try and get out on the mountain bike a couple of times a week (off-road only, no Lycra here thanks).

Well, it sounds like you lead a busy life, thank you James for agreeing to this and your excellent answers, it's been a pleasure.