

Housing drives hire market

Recent surges in hiring patterns of cordless tools, such as dry-wall sanders, generators and compressors for new sites suggest that housebuilding and public sector projects are picking up



HIRE MARKET
NEIL GRAHAM

Despite the challenges the construction industry has faced as a whole this year, the hire industry seems to have remained relatively buoyant.

The recent economic predictions of improved industry growth and the latest purchasing managers' index have been largely reflected in the pace of work.

Despite reports showing a slight 0.1 per cent dip in construction output figures in August, our figures showed a strong growth in hire turnover across our three depots last month - up almost 13 per cent per day since July - and a record hire figure overall.

Our new east London depot has also seen growth per day of 25 per cent.

We have now been operating at full capacity for a number of months, with several of our tools running at 100 per cent utilisation - bowser pressure washers being one example.

As a result, we have been cautiously increasing stock levels to meet demand, recently placing new orders for generators, concrete poker units, podiums, towers and pressure washers.

Although autumn has always traditionally been a busy season for the hire industry, we have seen a number of trends emerging from the tools we are currently hiring out, and the projects and sectors they are going to.

Housebuilding is undoubtedly the biggest growth sector. Drylining companies, RC frame contractors and interior, fit-out



Bowser pressure washers are popular choices

25%
Turnover growth at
The Hireman's east
London depot

and concrete restoration firms are all backing up recent reports that housing is driving recovery.

Public sector projects

In addition to private sector residential projects, we've also noted an increase in hire for public sector projects, such as schools and hospitals.

In terms of tools, we've seen a huge focus on the hire of cordless tools, particularly flex dry-wall sanders, such as the Flex WST 700, which are mainly used for wall partitioning and refurbishment.

We've also noticed a spike in the number of generators and compressors going out - most likely to be used for site power onto new sites, which again is a positive indicator that the industry activity is picking up.

The railway sector continues to hire at a steady rate, with ongoing projects such as Crossrail and Tube works, with tools mainly going out for maintenance and demolition work.

Breakers are proving popular - particularly Hilti - and specifically lighting products, such as LED work lights.

These lights are cordless and rechargeable with an eight-hour battery life, which make them well suited to use on rail and underground projects.

Generators for power supply are a huge risk underground as there is no ventilation for them, and the fact that they are cordless reduces trip hazards.

Access equipment

Both our central and west London depots have also experienced a huge surge in mobile access equipment and the number of towers and podiums out on hire - particularly Euro Towers products.

The vast majority of them - the podiums in particular - are being hired to drylining and fire-protection companies for residential and office block redevelopment.

A challenge we face is having enough staff to take the orders. Recruitment into the hire office

has always been difficult, and we have now decided to take a different approach.

Rather than target the job to trained and experienced hire controllers, we've now introduced a management training programme to try to attract graduates into the company.

These people will be trained up to become our next managers and so far we have seen some notable successes - both in the hire office and our workshops.

Neil Graham is managing director at The Hireman

Deadline looms for CITB grant claimants



TRAINING
DAMON SCHÜNMMANN

The Construction Plant-hire Association has reminded its members that employers looking to claim for CITB training grants for the 2012/13 Grants Scheme will have to act fast as the deadline for claimants is approaching.

The training body says all eligible employers registered with it will have until 31 October to put in their claims for training carried out, or for the achievement of approved qualifications, between 1 August 2012 and 31 July 2013.

In addition to the existing grant available, those that have made and had a grant claim accepted during the 2012/13 grants scheme year will be eligible for the Exceptional Training Grant - a scheme launched earlier this year to encourage training.

The ETG, a £30m motivational scheme, will be based on a percentage of all grants claimed ▶