

11 THE PRACTICE OF SAFETY

Many times managers view the issue of safety through rose-colored glasses. What we can't see often looks pretty good, in a compromising sort of way. All the while employees are asked to do more with less and, by the way, do it safely.

One manager expresses this frustration: "These DOT guys are breathing down my neck, OSHA wants to do a volunteer audit, the insurance company loss control guy just handed me 14 recommendations or they will cancel our insurance, and my best driver just got a DUI."

Having your insurance pay a liability claim can be costly, but the fines from DOT and OSHA add up to real money that can chew up the bottom line. Violations in relation to a liability incident can bring heavy penalties and increased judgments. You may not be able to sell enough gas to replace the cost.

How about your company? Are you practicing safety or playing compliance catch-up? If it looks cloudy, lose the rose-colored glasses.

Practice is defined as a custom or habit of doing some-

thing; to apply; to put into effect, to exercise or rehearse.” Synonyms include exercise, habit, custom, manner, usage, drill, tradition, performance, action, and repetition.

What a great list of words from which to reference when evaluating your safety program. Custom, habit, work, professions, exercise, rehearse; drill and tradition are all words that reinforce proper procedure. They represent a benchmark of standards for safety achievement. When we practice good habits we reinforce proper procedure. When we practice bad habits we reinforce poor procedure.

I once related a story to a client about the cat that jumped up on the hot stove and never again would jump on a stove – hot or cold. Think of all the cats that routinely jump up on a cold stove and have yet to land on a hot one! Low frequency, high severity. Sound familiar?

Safety priorities are the road map to safe growth. If we view these issues as professional priorities and rehearse expected outcomes, it establishes a tradition of doing the right thing. That’s the goal: No acceptable lapses in procedure. No blurring of priorities between operations and safety. No jumping on hot stoves.

The art of measuring safety performance is a highly skilled task. When you inspect what you expect you can measure results. If your current measuring process sounds a little like “no news is good news,” I have some bad news for you. Luck can only take you so far, and the sun doesn’t

shine on the same dog's butt every day.

In safety, I sometimes feel that communication between employers and employees is like the relationship between a parent and a child. No must mean no. Actions must be measured. Disciplines must mean business.

How often have you heard the mother in the store repeatedly say, "Bobby, for the last time, put that down!" and "I really mean it this time!"

And we are only seeing the times when Bobby gets caught. Imagine what goes on beyond the parent's watchful eye. Imagine what goes on beyond the manager's watchful eye.

I have often heard propane managers lament: "I know we have to be better, but I just can't get them to do it." Sounds like a hostage situation to me. Get out the riot gear, bring in a negotiator (consultant) and remember: We don't negotiate with liability terrorists.

Does a mandatory leak test on an out-of-gas situation mean a mandatory leak test on an out-of-gas situation? Does clear file documentation every day mean clear file documentation every day? Does mandatory use of chock blocks mean mandatory use of chock blocks? How about getting the customer's signature when required?

We all live in the real world where values are discarded

and rules are bent every day. That doesn't make it right. It doesn't mean we are getting away with anything. When we bend the rules we cheat ourselves and jeopardize the safety of our employees and customers. They look to us to teach them, by example, to be held accountable to do the right thing.

This may sound pretty heavy handed. But sometimes that's what it takes to achieve compliance: No exceptions. No prisoners. No hostages. No excuses.

Remember: When it comes to safety, practice makes perfect.