

Don't forget safety in a difficult economy!

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Economic times are difficult in nearly every country. Sales and profits are down and many companies are losing money. Plants are operating at reduced rate, and some are being shut down. As profits fall, there is increased pressure to reduce operating cost, including reduction in staff. More frequent shutdowns and startups, or operation at reduced rates, may impact safe operations and stress people. The increased stress on workers can cause inattention to detail and mistakes. Despite these pressures, both management and workers must remain focused on safety, and process safety. Ensure that training and preventive maintenance, both essential to safety and long term economic success, are not compromised. Decisions to reduce staffing need to be carefully considered using your facility's management of change process, and you must ensure that safety critical activities are not compromised by staff reductions.

Even during economic downturns, spending for needed process safety measures must be maintained ... companies should weigh each decision to make sure that the safety of plant workers, contractors, and communities is protected. In the long run, companies that continue to invest in safety will reap benefits far into the future.

-- John Bresland, Chairman, United States Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

What can you do?

- Maintain continued emphasis on safety values and standards in a difficult economy. We must maintain our focus on process safety under all circumstances..
- Understand what activities are safety critical in your facility, and make sure these activities are not compromised by economic pressures.
- Suggest opportunities to perform important safety related maintenance and modifications and improvements during periods of reduced demand. The recession may present a good opportunity to conduct these activities. Market demand is low and the plant may be shut down or running at reduced rate anyway.
- If you are aware of critical safety equipment or safety activities which are being adversely impacted by cost saving measures, make sure that your management is aware of the issues. Decisions may have been made on cost without fully understanding the potential safety impact.
- Use management of change reviews to fully understand the impact of all changes, including staffing changes, reduced operating rate, changes in operating schedule, and other cost cutting plant modifications.

Don't let short term economic pain cause long term safety damage!