

Stop! Look! Listen!

December 2015

We have all seen some version of the signs on the right at a railroad crossing which is not protected by gates or warning lights. The signs remind you to STOP before crossing the tracks, LOOK in both directions for an approaching train, and LISTEN for a train whistle. Only after doing this can you be confident that it is safe to cross.



When you are working in a process plant, you should also take time to STOP for a few minutes, LOOK around at your plant, and LISTEN to it. Your plant is always sending you information about its status, but are you looking and listening? Here are some examples:



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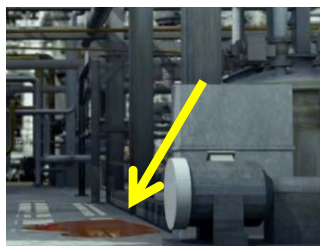
- An operator looked at an uninsulated steel tank and thought that the side of the tank wall appeared to be moving or vibrating. It just didn't look right. He reported it to his supervisor and the tank was emptied. It was found to be severely corroded, and the side wall of the tank was very thin.
- An electrician on the way to a job stopped and looked at some electrical equipment cabinets in another area. He saw one which was not properly closed, and made sure it was corrected.
- An operator walking past a reboiler recirculation pump on a distillation column thought that the pump was making unusual noises. The pump was inspected and contained fragments of metal. These were found to be parts of tray supports from the column, a number of which had corroded and failed.
- An engineer noticed a dust cloud and accumulated dust outside equipment containing combustible solids. There were potential ignition sources (electrical equipment and potential for electrostatic sparks) in the area. The equipment was stopped, the room was cleaned, and corrective actions to contain the dust were implemented.

What can you do?

- As you do your job, look at and listen to your plant. Does anything look or sound different? Are there things that you see or hear that ought to be investigated, but people have just stopped paying attention to them? This is called “normalization of deviation” – accepting things which should be corrected as “normal” and not taking action to correct them. Report anything that doesn't look or sound right and follow up to remind management to investigate.
- Change your route as you walk through your plant doing routine inspections to get a different view of the things that you pass.
- Here are some examples of potential safety issues you might observe:



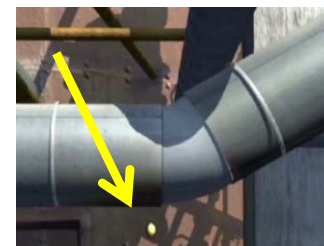
That tank looks rusty and corroded!



What is that puddle on the floor?



Is that a crack in this pipe?



Is something dripping from this insulated pipe?

Note: Pictures are screen captures from United States Chemical Safety Board videos (www.csb.gov).

You can see a lot just by looking.

- Yogi Berra (Baseball Hall of Fame catcher, 1925-2015)

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