

Haste Makes Waste

We've all been there: You need to trash a piece of paper, but instead of taking four steps to the trash can, you throw it and miss. You then have to walk over, retrieve the paper, and throw it away. Although you were originally trying to take a shortcut, you actually ended up expending more effort. And, if you had not retrieved the trash, someone else would have had to do it for you.

This same scenario can be applied to process safety tasks. If you don't do a task right the first time, you will have to do it over, or somebody will have to do it for you. Process safety tasks are typically not as obvious or innocuous as trash on the floor. For example, not checking an instrument or following a procedure correctly the first time can have grave and unforeseen consequences for you, your coworkers, the community, and the environment.



Why is it important?

Shortcuts, such as silencing alarms without taking corrective action, failing to make rounds to check plant status, and carrying out plant procedures without a checklist, have contributed to many process safety incidents.

While these tasks may seem minor, they can have severe consequences if they are not carried out correctly. Improper, inaccurate, or poorly used procedures, for example, have caused major incidents with many fatalities and injuries. An explosion at a fertilizer plant in Port Neal, IA, in December 1994 caused four fatalities and 18 injuries. Much of the plant was destroyed and chemical

releases significantly impacted the environment. The investigation team concluded that a lack of written, safe operating procedures created conditions in the plant that contributed to the explosion.

Some tasks are not as easy as simply following a written procedure. To read an instrument, you may have to climb many flights of stairs; verifying a tank level may mean unlocking an enclosure; and checking a valve position might require walking to the far end of the plant. It is easy to rationalize skipping such tasks when you are busy and you assume someone else will do it. However, if everyone thinks this way, the task will never get done.



What can you do?

- Follow procedures completely. If procedures are inaccurate or incorrect, work to determine the source of the problem.
- Conduct plant inspection rounds thoroughly.
- Note anything that looks or sounds unusual when making plant rounds, such as inspection points that are difficult to access, instruments that are not calibrated or not working correctly, unknown liquids dripping from pipes, agitators that are shaking, or pumps making strange noises. Problems can't get fixed if no one knows about them.

◀ An explosion at a Port Neal, IA, fertilizer plant killed four and injured 18. A lack of safe, written operating procedures contributed to the accident.

If you don't have time to do it right the first time, where will you find the time to do it over?

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