

Surrounded by Too Many Warning Signs?

Technicians and operators in the chemical process industries (CPI) can become overloaded with warning signage, nuisance alarms, and other safety communications. These communications can become so commonplace that personnel grow accustomed to them. When a warning sign becomes mundane to employees, it no longer serves its intended purpose. If people are bombarded with too many safety communications, they may ignore a warning sign in a process area or skip over the cautions mentioned in a procedure.

The two photographs on the right were taken at an airport where workers were using a personnel lift to access an elevated location for maintenance. The platform displays 24 warning labels. All of these warning signs acknowledge a different caution to be heeded. However, it is unlikely that an operator would take the time to review and understand each of the 24 warning labels before using the lift.



Are the many warning signs at your facility actually distracting or overwhelming, such that personnel cease to pay attention to them? Does the presence of too many cautions defeat their purpose?

Did You Know?

- Warning signs are posted to remind people about specific equipment and process hazards in an area.
- Warning signs may also specify things that are not safe in a specified process area or in relation to a specified piece of equipment.
- In a process area, signs often list requirements for personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safety information. Warnings and PPE requirements may also be included in operating and maintenance procedures or work permit documents.
- If there are too many signs or procedure warnings, some may be overlooked and an incident may occur.

What Can You Do?

- Always read the warning signs before entering a process area or using a piece of equipment. Remind yourself of what should and should not be done.
- Read and understand the safety and PPE requirements in operating procedures, maintenance procedures, or work permit documents. Follow these requirements, and ask for help from your supervisor if you do not understand the requirements.
- If you think that a written procedure or a signboard contains too many warnings that may distract readers from what is essential, report that to your supervisor.
- Check that signs are in the right places, are accurate, and are effective reminders.
- Suggest opportunities to improve warning signs or warnings in procedures. For example, there are 24 warning labels on the platform in the picture above. Could some of these warning labels be combined, prioritized, or even omitted, if unnecessary?
- Read the May 2013 Beacon for more examples of poor signs.

Warning signs are more effective when they are relevant and concise!

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