

BOX SCORE

AICC

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Featured in this issue . . .
AICC Fall Meeting Preview . . .
LAS VEGAS!

Safety:

**JUNE IS
NATIONAL
SAFETY MONTH.
ARE YOU READY?**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**Does Safety
Matter to You?**

**Shipmaster Container
Celebrates 50 Years!**

**Family Leave,
EPA Action Call for
Industry Vigilance –
and Response**

**Congressman Phil Roe
Visits with Lee Shillito
After an AICC Fly-In**

**Is Your Box Quality As
Good As You Think?**



Does Safety Matter to You?

By Dwayne Shrader

A paramedic friend of mine — we'll call him Mike — stopped by to see me recently and was telling me about rescue he had been on the week before. A pressman at one of the local printing companies had become caught in a press and was pulled in up to his shoulder before one of his co-workers managed to stop the machine. Mike went on in grueling detail — of which I will spare you — how he had to keep the poor guy sedated for the nearly three hours it took to free him.

What caused such an accident? According to Mike, one of the other employees told him that the operator had been having problems with the sheets “catching” (jamming) and had removed a guard from the feeder. This allowed him to reach in and “flick the bad sheets with his finger” before they could cause a jam.

So how about your Safety Program?

Most, probably all, manufacturing plants have some form of safety program in place. However, the depth and professionalism of the programs varies widely from company to company, sometimes even between plants within the same company. Some plants choose only to provide mandated training for employees, covering such topics as MSDS (Material Data Safety Sheets), bio hazards, and so on, in a formal setting and take a far more casual approach to other safety issues. Often equipment safety training is on-the-job — training by demonstration which is handed down by the current or previous operator. Relying on this as the primary means of safety training, unfortunately, can result in the loss of important details and the all too common transfer bad habits.

Better box plants have very in-depth programs which include classroom training, computer based or other self-paced systems such as AICC's SafetyFirst DVD program. A few organizations even require employees to successfully complete specific safety training before being allowed to operate certain machines, perform certain tasks or receive promotions.

What about our example earlier from a local printing company? Yes they have a safety program in place, a pretty good one as a matter of fact. They have formal

training including classroom sessions performed by their safety officer and department supervisors. They also have strict enforcement and severe consequences for breaking the safety rules. Yet, apparently this particular employee thought, for whatever reason, that convenience or meeting his production number was more important than his own safety.

Why does safety get bypassed?

First of all, there is no good reason for bypassing safety. Period! However, an operator may justify the risk for reasons of convenience, pressure to meet quotas or deadlines and ego/machismo.

If an operator is faced with a load of bad board and pressure to maintain a schedule, there's a pretty good chance he'll find a way to work around the issue. Often the work-around is less than safe. The same is true for faulty equipment. If a feature on a machine doesn't function as it should, the operator will, if possible, find a way to work around it. After all, he needs to get his job done. Again, this can result in an unsafe situation.

The supervisors' responsibility is not only to teach the operator the safe way to perform the task but also to ensure that operators are following the rules. Management at all levels must make sure that communication channels remain open and that operators are comfortable enough to make the safe decision when productivity versus safety becomes an issue. It's important that they know they won't be chastised or punished for missing a deadline if safety is at risk.

Often we see shops that wear their safety colors with great pride, yet place such a high importance on meeting production numbers that operators can become confused. Operators can be placed in the position where they have to make the choice between their own safety and meeting their production numbers. Granted, efficiency, productivity and meeting schedules are very important to the success of a business, but safety should never play second fiddle. Operators must never be afraid to challenge a quota when safety is in question.

Supervisors must also be sure they lead by example. I once saw an operator point out a damaged guard on a machine to his



Dwayne Shrader

supervisor. The supervisor's response was, “Just be careful around it until I can get Maintenance over to fix it.”

Subconsciously he was telling the operator that productivity was a higher priority for him than was safety. The end result is likely to be that the next time there's a safety issue the operator will ignore it until the supervisor happens by, or worse, ignore it completely. In this instance it took maintenance about twenty-minutes to make their way to the machine. Fortunately, everyone remained safe in the mean time. To the maintenance supervisor's credit, he observed that the machine in its current state was not safe to operate and had the operator put on housekeeping tasks until the repair was made.

Dealing with Superman.

Ever have an employee that's so tough, so fast and so sure of his/her ability that they know they are in total control and therefore believe it's OK to side-step some safety rules. “Don't worry about me,” goes the old refrain. “I know when I can reach in there. I've been doing this for 20 years.”

Once in a box plant I observed one particular Superman reaching inside a piece of running equipment each time it cycled to tweak an adjustment. He had been a long time employee of the company and other than being a bit hard-headed, was a great employee. He was always on time, produced good quality and generally was someone a supervisor or co-worker could turn to in a pinch. So instead of getting the “First Time Safety Write-Up” which was required by his company's policy, he was cut a break for a foolish and dangerous action and only received a verbal warning.

His rational, in addition to “he knew what he was doing,” was that it took twice as long if he had to stop the

— continued on page 24

Does Safety Matter to You?

— continued from page 23

machine, make the adjustment and restart it. True. It did. However, that was better than the lost time recovering from an accident.

We've probably all dealt with a Superman at one time or another. Unfortunately, this Superman story didn't have a happy ending. After finally being "written-up" for the same offense, he was caught teaching the trick to a junior technician. His employment with the company was ended by his supervisor that day . . . actually that moment . . . and the junior tech was immediately disciplined.

It was unfortunate for both guys. If the proper disciplinary action would have been taken in the first place, the serious nature of the infraction might have sunk in and the junior technician probably would not have ever been involved.

Often supervisors feel they should cut a long-time or faithful employee a break on a safety issue. However, we have to remember that:

- It sets a bad example for that employee and any others may see or hear of the event.

- Can present an even greater danger since junior employees often look up to, or look to these employees for their experience and advice.
- Can leave you open to legal issues if there is an incident in the future.

No matter how hard you try there are some people to whom you will just never get through. Unfortunately they're like dandelions, if one is allowed to grow, they'll spread and the situation can quickly get out of control. So, friend, faithful employee, or even owner . . . no one should be above enforcement of the safety rules.

A lesson learned, relearned and then learned some more.

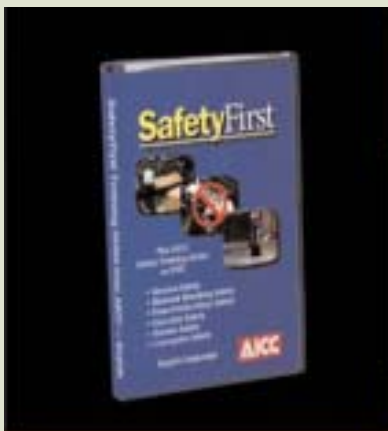
Safety starts with training, is reinforced with training and continues with training. Continual — and what may sometimes seem repetitive — training is necessary because all of us easily forget over time. We let old habits creep back in, complacency grows and the next thing you know, BANG! Someone is injured, time is lost and insurance rates go up. The smartest preventative measure therefore

is an ongoing program of safety training which even the "old hands" are required to attend periodically.

One last thought on training.

Does your program provide training for your front line supervisors on how to deal with safety issues and address infractions? Many times the supervisors have worked their way up through these same ranks and were at one time underlings or peers to those they now supervise. This can make it difficult for the supervisor, especially one that has been recently promoted. One of management's primary jobs therefore has to be making sure that supervisors supervise and everyone thinks about safety.

An industry veteran of 23 years, Dwayne Shrader authored and co-produced the recently released AICC SafetyFirst DVD video. He is Vice President of Griffin Communications where he is responsible for the creation of technical documentation and training materials in addition to advertising and public relations for the company's industry clients.



The series will offer six modules:

- General Safety
- Material Handling Safety
- Flexo-Folder-Gluer Safety
- Diecutter Safety
- Stacker Safety
- Corrugator Safety

AICC's

New SafetyFirst DVD Series

◀◀ SafetyFirst Series DVD Spanish version will be available this summer

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