A Short Talk to Injury

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

People are creatures of habit. Workers react based on learned behavior. What's at stake here is firstly; identify unsafe work conditions and material and, secondly; proper training to avoid unsafe working conditions.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Short cuts in proper monitoring supervision of employees can have bad consequences.

Example

Steve is a process technician. He is responsible for evaluating why equipment is down and making the necessary repairs to get the equipment running again. One day Steve was using Anhydrous Isopropyl Alcohol (Flash Point 54 degrees Fahrenheit) from a plastic squeeze bottle to clean part of a printing machine. The container was clearly labelled as "Flammable Liquid" with a workplace hazardous materials information system label including in house labeling. Since the printer uses an open flame processing unit, it is critical that the alcohol be properly handled and stored.

After completing the job, in an effort to save time, Steve started the printer and flame to dry the alcohol from the machine. The flame ignited the alcohol, causing a white-hot flame to flash from the printer. Steve was standing next to the printer and was still holding the plastic squeeze bottle. The flame ignited the alcohol on Steve's hands and in the bottle. This resulted in second and third degree burns on Steve's hands, arms and chest.

During his 2 ½ years with the company. Steve had attended several training sessions.
The alcohol container was clearly labeled. The company is very

concerned employee safety training. So why did this accident happen?

Since being hired, Steve had performed very well and had been promoted twice. But during the past 2 ½ years Steve has been involved in several “close call” incidents, seven minor first aid incidents, and one serious injury. Accident investigations revealed that Steve had violated “minor” safety rules in four of the first aid incidents. The same rule was violated in two of the “close call” incidents. Following each of these incidents, Steve received a verbal reprimand from this supervisor.

However, the serious accident happened while Steve was working on moving machinery, which was a violation of a “major” safety rule. Following the review of this incident by the safety committee, Steve was given a formal written warning and time off.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

People will react to situations based on learned behavior. Managers supervisors help define this behavior by the way they manage their employees. Steve was used to cutting corners to get the job done so he would look good. He knew how far he could go without being disciplined. His supervisor encouraged this behavior because no formal discipline was given except for “major” violations. This helped define the limits within which Steve would work.

Lessons learned from Steve’s tragic mistake. First: Employees must always keep their guard up, look for unsafe acts and conditions, and never take their personal safety for granted. Second: This is why managers and supervisors must consistently and fairly enforce ALL safety rules. This combined with safety training will help develop save behaviors and lead to fewer accidents.

FINAL WORD

Never take safety for granted. A small safety infraction has a way of turning into a big accident.