Stay Safe During a Shutdown

Safety Talk

What’s at Stake?

During a shutdown, process industries such as oil and gas slow or stop work and inspect, maintain, repair and replace equipment. If you are working through a plant slowdown or shutdown, you need to be aware of the new hazards created during this time.

What’s the Danger?

Any change in the work environment can create hazards. Construction, demolition and renovation can turn your familiar work area into a strange, poorly lighted obstacle course. Temporary and contract workers carrying out maintenance can also be wild cards when it comes to your safety. They should be trained and supervised, but they don’t know the plant like you do.

Construction and maintenance work may also prevent areas from being locked and guarded as well as usual. The risk of theft or even assault can also be higher because of the influx of unfamiliar workers.

How to Protect Yourself

Get Clear Direction

Ask your supervisor about what you are supposed to be doing. If the duties are unfamiliar, get the necessary training.

Find out who is responsible for what.

- Who oversees the temporary workers and the contractors?
- How do you report safety concerns – has the process changed?
- Whom should you contact in an emergency?

ID New Hazards

- If lines and tanks are being drained, is there a chance of chemical exposure?
- Are there new fire hazards associated with welding or painting activities?
- Which machines will be locked/tagged out for repair or maintenance?

PPE

- You'll need a hardhat for areas under construction and in any area where there are overhead hazards or the potential for falling objects.
- Safety footwear and other kinds of protective equipment also might be needed.
- Safety glasses are almost certain to be required and don't forget to protect your hearing and wear your hearing protection.

Be Alert

- Doing your job on automatic pilot is a bad idea at any time, but particularly when the worksite is disrupted.
- Shutdowns can mean long hours and many days of work without a day off.
- Try and get plenty of sleep, watch your consumption of alcohol after work, and make healthy choices when it comes to food.

Security Concerns

- Report poor lighting inside and outside the plant.
- Ensure doors and windows are closed as required and badge and sign-in systems are observed.
- Stop and question strangers in the work area.

Final Word

Keep your attention on business and safety during a shutdown. All the usual hazards are there, and likely some new ones, too.