

IN THIS COLUMN I HAVE TRIED TO DISCUSS many safety issues that I haven't found covered elsewhere, or that aren't usually at the top of a list of most company's concerns. For instance, over the past 40 years I have visited many shops for reasons that vary from safety issues to others concerning production or repairs, and one thing I've noticed is that just about everybody uses some form of drying agent for absorbing the oil spills that occur in most manufacturing environments. I always have mixed emotions when I see these materials on the floor. While it's a good thing that someone recognized the danger that a spill represents and tried to do something about, those same materials are often left in place for far



SITESAFETY

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too long, becoming something of a hazard in themselves. I realize that the agent takes a little time to work, but if you think about it, even though they're definitely better than the oil they're absorbing, those loose granules on the floor are still a “slip and fall” hazard. In other words, putting an oil-drying agent on a spill is really just the beginning of the safety cleanup. It needs to be completed by removing the agent itself. I know you're thinking “Who has the time to do that?” My response would be that by trying to save time in the short term, you're running the risk of enabling an injury that could be devastating to both the employee—in terms of physical pain, and worse—and the employer, who could be found responsible for not providing a safe workplace. And even if you have every intention of cleaning up the mess as soon as the shift is over, or the production run is finished, we all know what the path to hell is

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paved with. So take a minute and attend to the business at hand, before it veers off in a direction you didn't anticipate.

Something that might not be quite as pressing or tangible as an oil spill involves the issue of whether your shop has a “culture of safety.” By this I mean, does every employee in your company actually participate in your safety program? I find that the majority of shops have at least one employee who really gives no more than lip service to the whole matter. They all have their reasons, which include such justifications as “I know how to do my job better than some guy whose only priority is safety” or “If I did everything they say I should do to be safe, I would never get any real work done.” Those of us who consider ourselves to be safety professionals can quote OSHA, NIOSH, and all the other various agencies on what you as an employer must do to maintain a safe work environment, even citing what these agencies can do to you if you don't follow the rules. But the reality is that it's not up to those of us who write about safety, or those of you who are charged with providing it. We can suggest training, and you can offer incentives, but what it really comes down to is the individual who might be affected by an injury—or cause one to others. Can he or she be convinced that complying with your safety program will be to their benefit? To be honest, this is something that should be taken into consideration during the interview process, long before someone is actually added to the payroll, because if you can't count on an employee to take something as important as safety seriously, there may be deficiencies in other areas as well.

I have come to believe that there are some employees that you will never be able to convince to work in a safe and responsible manner, and that's when the question becomes whether or not the skills they bring to your company are worth the potential danger they represent by not abiding by the rules. And while I have my own opinion, that's really a question that you will have to answer for yourself. Just be sure to remember that you have a responsibility to everyone who works for you, and especially those who may be harmed by someone else's careless actions or behavior. 

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