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SAFETY MATTERS

The most comprehensive safety program can be undermined by employee apathy. Here's a timely reminder of the importance of promoting safe practices.

What is the single most important issue that affects all of us who are involved in this industry? Is it the work environment, or dealing with sharp cutting tools? Or maybe it's weight issues during the loading and unloading process. Could it be pinch points in the machinery, or maybe coolant issues?

Whether a shop is large or small, I believe that the primary safety issue we all face is apathy. Safety doesn't seem to become a concern until an accident actually occurs. It's only in the aftermath of an accident that we take the time to question our procedures and preparations, and even then we only spend as much time and energy as is necessary to prevent that same accident from reoccurring. Safety is a hard sell!

And it's an issue that we all hope we'll never have to deal with, especially should things go wrong. In the ideal world that only exists in our imaginations, safety is something that's just there: it's someone else's concern, not ours. After all, everyone is ultimately responsible for their own safety, aren't they?

So how do we deal with apathy? We must first create an atmosphere in our workplace where safety isn't an afterthought, but a way of life. In order to do this, we must truly commit to a safe and productive work environment. Each employee is an important piece of that overall commitment, and he or she must always be aware of the safety aspects of their job. Any apathy toward safety must be met with the strongest possible objection. Safety must be defined so that each employee at any level within the company can understand and relate to it.

I think that we have to define "safety" in a number of different ways, depending on who we're dealing with. First we have to define it for ourselves, as individuals. Safety, to me, is working in a logical and cautious manner. It involves looking at each individual procedure that must be performed and, prior to taking any action, determining the manner in which I am least likely to cause an accident that could injure myself or someone else. If each employee would approach situations in this way, accidents could be prevented.

Then there's the meaning of the word from a boss's perspective. To define safety to a supervisor, we must be able to describe the process we're involved in and explain our reasons for the actions we're taking. There are always certain aspects of production that must be taken into special consideration, and in these instances it's up to the supervisor to determine whether our course of action is appropriate or not for what

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we're doing. We can't jeopardize an employee's safety in the name of production, of course, but without the best possible approaches to production there will be no job. The supervisor will have access to equipment and methods that can maintain safety while enabling continued production.

Yet another explanation must be made to upper management, and in this case it should be that overall safety in our facility will save money. It will accomplish this through lower insurance premiums and less time lost to injuries.

Apathy is a nasty and pervasive attitude that causes more accidents in industrial settings than any other single factor. Posters, meetings, classes, and manuals are a beginning in combating this problem, but it is only by convincing each and every employee in our company of the impor-

tance of safety that we can hope to realize the gains that can be made by practicing safe workplace methods.

I would love to hear what you are doing to promote safe practices within your company. Please contact me through this magazine and perhaps we can share your good ideas with others in our industry. ☐

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

With more than 30 years of experience in the gear industry, Terry McDonald is a manager with Repair Parts, Inc., a partner with Re-New Machine & Maintenance, Inc., and a current member and past-chairman of the American National Standards Institute B11.11 Subcommittee on Safety Requirements for Construction, Care, and Use of Gear Cutting Equipment. McDonald writes this monthly column specifically for *Gear Solutions* magazine. He can be contacted through the magazine at editor@gearsolutionsonline.com. Responses and reactions to his column are also welcome.