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# Editor's Message

## Ideas for Safe Material Handling

by Barry Dixon

In this issue, we're focusing on material handling and equipment, which gives us the opportunity to reemphasize the safety of our shop workers. Addressing safety in a truss plant can be very overwhelming. Here are four areas where each of us can take steps to help prevent accidents in our industry: machinery maintenance/examination, emergency procedures, Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) and safety drills.

### Machinery Maintenance/Examination

Many of us have machinery in our plants that is more than 20 years old. At the time of original purchase, this equipment had state-of-the-art safety guards, but a lot can change over the years. If you compare today's modern saws against your old saws, you will notice numerous subtle safety improvements, such as safety bars to prevent any moving parts from catching on hands or clothing. Take the time to evaluate both your old and new machinery to ensure that all of your equipment has the most current safety features or retrofits. Areas to examine with your safety team include the infeed/outfeed conveyors on your saws, the location of safety cords, and the accessibility of the emergency shut-off switch. On the presses—both the gantry or the finish press—check the operation of safety bars, and the effectiveness of the brakes on the roller, which is critical in avoiding an accident. Advancements in the latest models allow for machinery to stop on a dime and even reverse if necessary, unlike older machines that took much longer to come to a sudden stop. In all areas of your shop, the only fail-proof safety device is the power termination to the equipment. When examining your safety procedures, make sure these power switches are visibly marked and readily accessible.

### Emergency Procedures

Along with evaluating and updating your machinery where necessary, it's important to revisit your company's emergency procedures. A thorough and ongoing safety protocol begins with developing a safety team and using a well-defined safety program like WTCA's Operation Safety and Forklift Certification Program. Developed specifically for manufacturers in our industry, these programs will help you draft and implement all of the necessary procedures to ensure a safer working environment.

One area that we have found to be critical for our safety program at True House is the creation of a safety committee. Comprised 100 percent of plant employees from various areas of our manufacturing facility, these committee members are the most knowledgeable of our machinery and, in our minds, the ones who should decide if we are doing everything possible to create a safe working environment. The committee meets regularly to discuss any and all safety issues, from a pothole out in the yard to the location of emergency shut-off switches on machinery. The committee makes recommendations and raises safety issues to the company, and then management works with this team to implement safety procedures and upgrades.

From these safety committee meetings, it became evident that repetitive reminders are critical when driving home safety and emergency procedures. These daily reminders call attention to reviewing the operation of safety stops, along with visibly marking locations for power disconnects, and other visible safety warnings. I liken this to a parent teaching their child to cross the street. Over and over as kids,

Continued on page 8

Employ these tips to achieve safety in material handling!

### at a glance

- Remember safety when you consider material handling in your operation.
- Creating a safety committee is a great way to inspire a culture of safety and discuss areas of the plant to examine.

# FORGING AHEAD TOGETHER

## Editor's Message

Continued from page 7

we heard the echo of, "Look both ways before you cross." It's now so deeply ingrained in us that many of us still do!

Another safety improvement that has come out of our company's committee is the development of our team concept. We are all safer when we look out for each other. For example, the sawyer/catcher or stacker/press operator work together as a team to maintain the highest safety standards, not to mention look out for each other. We believe our safety-in-numbers theory strengthens our chances of avoiding serious injury.

### Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP)

Another opportunity to take your safety precautions to a higher level is to work with an agency to evaluate and continuously improve safety at your plant. At True House, we've worked with the University of South Florida to bring OSHA into our plant through its Voluntary Protection Program (VPP). This program is designed so that "qualified volunteers" work with component manufacturers to help you meet and exceed the OSHA safety requirements. Now some of you may be wondering, "Who invites OSHA to their plant?" I have to admit, we were skeptical at first, but it's been a very positive experience that's made huge inroads in building a relationship with the agency. Instead of the adversarial relationship some may think of where OSHA comes to a plant to find problems and hand out fines, we work together with the agency to make our plant safer and avoid injuries. Plus, studies have shown that companies that take part in programs like this one have an average 50 percent lower DART case rate.<sup>1</sup> For more information, contact OSHA's Office of Partnerships and Recognition at 202/693-2213 or visit [www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/index.html). For more about manufacturers working with OSHA in other kinds of programs, see "OSHA: A Welcome Visitor" from the March 2007 issue.

### Safety Drills

The last piece of advice I want to leave you with is to practice what you preach! Conduct emergency safety drills to see just how prepared your team is. Afterwards, evaluate what went right and what still needs to be addressed. Stage impromptu accidents on various pieces of equipment and see how everyone reacts. Just like that reminder to look both ways before crossing the street, mock accidents and safety drills are key to driving home your safety procedures so that they become second nature for everyone.

I hope that you glean at least one good idea from this article; one that could help to create a safer facility for all. **SBC**

*SBC Magazine encourages the participation of its readers in developing content for future issues. Do you have an article idea for a future issue or a topic that you would like to see covered? Email your thoughts and ideas to [editor@sbcmag.info](mailto:editor@sbcmag.info).*

<sup>1</sup> [www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/all\\_about\\_vpp.html](http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/all_about_vpp.html)

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS™

THE FUTURE OF FRAMING

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