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SAFETY MATTERS

Compiling a company's safety handbook is an ongoing process, in constant need of being updated, and the best way to make sure it's accurate is to involve each and every employee in its creation.

“I wonder what went wrong?” How often do we make this statement when discussing an accident that occurred in our plant? One of the hardest things to do as a safety minded employee is to determine the real reason for the failure of the safety procedures. Note that I said the REAL reason. It is all too easy to blame an obvious cause such as a lack of attention or failure to follow the rules. These things are not the real causes of an accident, they are probably just a result of the real cause. We often talk about getting to the bottom of a problem, or maybe “seeing the whole story.” These clichés are often overused and not really believed in. The only effective way that we can keep accidents from reoccurring is to truly determine the real reason for the accident happening in the first place.

In previous columns I have advocated the creation of safety handbooks. While I remain strongly in favor of documenting the proper rules, procedures, and regulations, it is important that we realize that this documentation is simply words written on paper and not some kind of magic bullet that will solve all of our safety issues. Documenting the procedures, rules, and regulations is only a small step in the process of making our work environment safe for us all. If the information in your handbook is not properly disseminated among your employees, or if it is not understood—or even worse, not agreed upon—it is of no value at all. We must write the safety manuals in a manner that all of our employees can read and understand. We must involve each and every one of them from the very top to the

newest hire in the creation of these safety procedures. The people who are performing the tasks are the ones who are best suited to explain the safest way to perform them, and the only way that our safety handbooks are going to work is if everyone has input and agrees that the procedure is safe. Too often we see the safety handbook as simply being a handout to a new employee. It

should be read and gone over with the employee's immediate supervisor prior to the employee performing any of their assigned tasks. It is important that each new

employee understands and agrees with the safety handbook, and until that point has been reached, it is imperative that the employee not be put to work.

Another factor in this vein is that any safety handbook is simply a work in progress. A safety handbook can never be

“done.” There are always new procedures to be documented and new processes, equipment, materials, and coolants, etc., that must be addressed by the safety handbook. I would think that a quarterly review of the handbook would be the minimum requirement, and more often if there is a major upgrade in your plant.

One of the major topics in this month's issue of the magazine is workholding. This is a topic that must be viewed from a safety standpoint. There are, of course, the obvious safety hazards such as the workholding tooling not being sufficient to keep

the part in the machine, or creating “pinch points” or having sharp edges, but we must also consider the safe envelope that the tooling must be used in. Often I see situations where the

tooling put the operator's hands in close proximity to the sharp cutting tool. This is an accident just waiting to happen. When you are designing or purchasing workholding tooling, please remember the operators that have to use it, because they are your most valuable assets. 📄

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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.