

**The problem with being exposed to loud noise is that hearing loss doesn't occur till years down the road, but the solution is simple—provide your employees with hearing protection, and tell them why it matters.**

In the October 2005 installment of this column we talked about being prepared for natural disasters. Well, it's that time of year again, and I would like to reiterate that we must be prepared for this type of problem. We all know that the parties affected by the storms of 2005 are still trying to survive and recover from the devastation that occurred. Are we in a better position to cope with this type of disaster than we were last year? Have we developed an emergency plan? If not, we'd better get on the stick, because the weather bureaus are predicting another year of strong storms. Does your emergency plan cover your business alone? Look at the problems that the affected companies are having just getting their employees to return to work. It's understandable that employees who lost everything and have no home or place to stay wouldn't wish to return to work until their families are safe and taken care of. In fact, they may not wish to return to the region at all. What do you have in your emergency plans to cover such a situation? After all, without our employees we don't have a business, so there's no better time than right now to establish our plans if we are to survive such a circumstance. Contact your local Federal Emergency Management Agency representative to obtain their input and advice—it may well save your business. The number for FEMA's headquarters is (202) 646-2500.


One topic that is covered in some depth in this issue is noise analysis. While this is a critical issue in the proper

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operation of gear trains, noise is also a safety hazard. There are numerous state and federal guidelines for the amount of noise we can be subjected to before we experience hearing difficulties. These are good for the employees as well as the companies. I know that after 40-some years of being around machines, my hearing is not as good as it once was, and I expect that many of you can commiserate with me. We not only have to be concerned with making quiet gears, we also have to be sure that the employees making the gears aren't subjected to damaging noise levels. We've talked about this before in this column, but

it just can't be overstressed. We must make hearing protection readily available to our employees, and be sure that it's used. Of course, that last bit is the hard part, but if we show our employees the results of hearing loss that they face, it's easy to get them to wear proper hearing protection. OSHA and NIOSH, as well as many local agencies, have posters and literature available to bring this fact home to your employees. The best part is that most of this information costs very little, or is free for the asking. You just have to ask.

Another subject that I'd like to revisit—which I touched on in last month's column—is the fact that allergy season is upon us. There seems to be a large increase in the number of people who suffer from allergic reactions, and this is a very real safety concern. Imagine what would happen if an operator in the process of changing a hob, or loading/unloading a heavy part, experienced a sneezing attack. The results could be very dangerous. We need to be aware of any allergies our employees have in order to prevent accidents from occurring.

One last thought: This time of year presents an excellent opportunity to check and restock our first aid kits. This is a task that often gets overlooked, and it could be a real problem if there is an injury that could be attended to with a simple Band-Aid or some gauze and the kit is empty. Please make sure that your company's first aid kits are restocked at regular intervals in order to prevent coming up empty-handed in such an event. 

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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