

Chris's Corner: Safety and Liability

One of the most common issues within my particular industry is safety. I genuinely believe that protecting our employees, for the simple sake of protecting them, is a good work place practice for many obvious reasons.

Over and above being genuinely concerned for your employees, if you protect them you can protect your bottom line. Regardless of your industry, workman's compensation insurance is a significant investment we all pay on an annual basis.

Unfortunately, if you have a major claim, it will cost you in increased premiums for several years forward. It always irked me that I pay for ten years, incident free, and then when I do have a claim, it still costs me for several years going forward.

I asked my agent why all the money I paid in previously, when I had no claims, has no impact on my premiums after a claim. Where did my money go? He said it went to pay for everyone else's claims.

For what it's worth, it's the same scenario with your Pennsylvania Unemployment taxes.

So it pays to encourage safe practices from your employees. It pays in dollars, avoids lost time and productivity.

In my particular affiliation with Hobart Service, they have gone as far to hire a safety manager. We get weekly safety briefs and best practices emailed to us. As part of both our online and factory training schools, safety issues are regularly addresses.

At their recommendations, we have updated our employee's personal protective equipment to include arc flash and burn protection. We are even getting safety harnesses to prevent falls from heights.

We take safety very seriously.

However, on the other hand, in the course of us doing repair work at customer facilities a few of our customers occasionally attempt to get us to put their employee and facility safety behind profits.

Most modern equipment, regardless of type and function, has some safeguards in place. Sometimes these safety devices, which are integral parts of the machinery, will wear out, break or malfunction. By their inherent design, if they're not functional the machine will not be functional.

Too many times my technicians are asked to bypass safety devices to keep machines operational if we are unable to repair the fault on the first trip. We as a business, doing business for and with Hobart Service, cannot do it. There is too much liability involved on our side.

But what about the liability to the company and management of a business that would even suggest that a safety be bypassed? Does one really believe they would be exempt from liability if an employee were to be hurt on a machine with a safety being bypassed? From what I have heard when a lawsuit goes down, no one is exempt. How is the bottom line going to be after settling a multi-million dollar law suit? Compare that outcome to the inability to being able to use a machine for a few days, at worse.

We had a situation where a machine was broken the other day. We had to order parts to get the machine operational. There was a chance

that we could temporarily patch up the machine to make it go, but we weren't comfortable with the reliability and safety of such a temporary fix.

When we returned to put on the replacement parts we found that the restaurant manager had rigged the machine to run. That is all well and good, but what if the manager's temporary, Mickey Mouse, repair would have resulted in the operator of the machine being injured?

The manager even questioned my technician as to why we hadn't rigged the machine for temporary use. When my tech explained that the temporary fix was part of an assembly connected to a high tension spring and should the hardware store bolt fail, the spring would slingshot towards the operator of the machine. The manager had kind of a sick look on their face in recognition of what could have happened. Luckily nothing did, but it wouldn't have been on us.

Making money is part of business, but practicing good safety is just as important to the bottom line and more.