

Stop! Look! Listen!

Railroad crossings that are not protected by gates or warning lights typically include signs to alert you of the potential for danger. Versions of the sign (Photos 1 and 2) all have one thing in common — the reminder to stop, look, and listen. Only after stopping before crossing the tracks, looking in both directions for approaching trains, and listening for a train whistle can you be confident that it is safe to cross.

This is a useful axiom for working in a processing facility. Take the time to stop periodically, look around at the plant, and listen to the sounds you hear. The plant is always sending you information about its status, but are you stopping to look and listen? Here are some examples where this advice proved to be beneficial:

- An operator looked at an uninsulated steel tank and noticed that the tank wall appeared to be moving or vibrating. He reported this observation to his supervisor, and upon emptying the tank they found severe corrosion and thinning of the tank sidewall.
- While on his way to a job, an electrician stopped and looked at some electrical equipment cabinets and saw that one was not closed properly. He made sure the oversight was corrected.
- An operator heard unusual noises coming from a reboiler recirculation pump on a distillation column. Inspection of the pump revealed that it contained metal pieces of tray supports from the column that had corroded and failed.

• An engineer noticed accumulated dust as well as a dust cloud near equipment containing combustible solids. Electrical equipment and sources of electrostatic sparks presented potential ignition sources for an explosion. The equipment was stopped, the room was cleaned, and corrective actions to contain the dust were implemented.



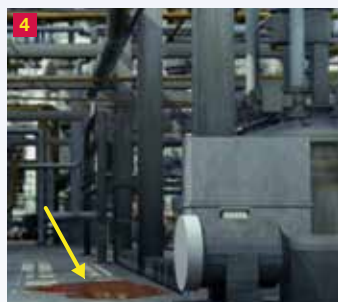
Image courtesy of David P. Howard.

What can you do?

- As you do your job, remember to stop, look at, and listen to your surroundings. Does anything look or sound different? Have you grown accustomed to any sights or sounds? Perhaps you are experiencing normalization of deviation, and accepting as normal things that should be corrected. Report anything that does not look or sound right to make sure it is investigated, and follow up with management to ensure the investigation takes place.
- Change your perspective by taking a different route as you carry out routine inspections. This might bring an abnormality to your attention that you typically miss or ignore.
- Pictures 3, 4, 5, and 6 (courtesy of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board) show potential safety issues to look for:



Rusting and corrosion of equipment



Puddles on the floor



Cracks in pipes and equipment



Drips from insulated pipe

"You can see a lot by just looking." — Yogi Berra (Baseball Hall of Fame catcher, 1925–2015)

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