

Share Stories to Communicate Safety

Story telling has been recognized for centuries as an effective way to impact the brain and the heart, as well as to preserve history. While fairy tales have proven to be useful tools for teaching children life lessons, stories can also be used to teach adults. Process safety pioneer Trevor Kletz often wrote about the value of stories in process safety. He argued that people remember stories, and that a story related to a process hazard can be much more impactful than lectures and other training materials.

The process industries have fortunately reduced the frequency of incidents. In the past, personnel gained respect for process hazards through firsthand experience. Training, drills, and procedures have largely replaced those experiences, and for the better. However, this makes the connection between “what to do” and “why to do it that way” much less clear, which can cause some to become complacent.

It is easy to forget that incidents do not happen as often as they once did because of procedures. Complacency that degrades adherence to process safety management (PSM) procedures is one of the first steps on a path that can lead to an incident. A story can be an effective method to convey the purpose of following PSM procedures to prevent incidents, especially when that incident has never happened to that person or at that facility.

► Stories are effective teaching tools for both children and adults because they are engaging and memorable. The story “Little Red Riding Hood,” for example, can be used to warn children of the dangers of talking to strangers. Process safety incident stories can be used similarly to warn personnel of the consequences of not following procedures, taking shortcuts, or other deviations.



What Can You Do?

- Share stories of process incidents that you have experienced or that others have told you about. Remind less-experienced personnel that incidents can happen and have happened before.
- If you are new to the process industries, ask veteran colleagues to share their past experiences related to incidents.
- As personnel change jobs or retire, record or document their memories of past incidents.
- Look for stories about incidents in any industry and relate

them to your position in the chemical process industries (CPI). Many Beacons cover such incidents and illustrate how they can inform operations in the CPI. For example, the Sept. 2016 Beacon discussed a fire on a passenger boat and related it to management of change, the Oct. 2018 Beacon talked about airplane engine failure and the importance of mechanical integrity, and the Dec. 2018 Beacon detailed a fire at the Atlanta airport and its relationship to emergency response and common-cause failures.

“Stories are where memories go when they are forgotten.”
 — Doctor Who, Series 9, Episode 12

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