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News about skilled trades, maintenance, and manufacturing

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Your Survival Guide to Plant Emergencies





Things happen. A motor fails. The power goes out. A barrel of solvent is accidentally spilled. There's never a good time for bad things to happen, but it seems they usually happen at the most expensive, difficult, and annoying times. Here are six steps to take, our Survival Guide for those times when bad things happen in the plant. This Guide can help you keep your plant running smoother, safer, and more economically. Not to mention prevent a few gray hairs.

How to survive a weekend breakdown

It seems like bad things always happen when the game is close. The phone rings, there's problem in the plant, and instead of reaching for another cold one, you're scrambling to find parts to fix something that's just broken on the plant floor.

Motors and controllers have an annoying habit of breaking down on weekends. Hoses, fuses, and belts wear out too, of course. But since most plants use a variety of motors, controllers, and other key components, it's often too expensive to stock a back-up for every possible part that might break down. So when the night crew smells a burned out motor, they don't have a replacement on hand, and they have to call you.

Here's how to keep from missing the end of the game. Do an inventory of can't-be-without components, the ones critical to production. Use that as your shopping list with the electrical houses and other parts suppliers. They have extra parts on hand, and extra incentive now to provide better pricing. A stash of key components is cheap insurance for your plant.

How to survive a power outage

Lightning strikes, brownouts, and other power outages show us all too clearly what the Dark Ages must have been like. You can't do much about lightning or the national power grid, but you *can* make sure your plant's emergency lighting is ready to shine when the power goes out.

Every six months, perform an actual cycle test on your emergency lights. Make sure the bulbs are good and the batteries charged. It only takes a few minutes per fixture, and it can prevent expensive injuries and other problems later on. Maybe even tonight.

How to survive a chemical spill

You know where most chemical spills happen: shipping & receiving. The chemical room is next, but it's a distant second. You can train the crew, post safety information, and provide and maintain the right equipment, and you should do all of those things. But accidents still happen.

First, make sure you have complete spill kits at every dock door and where chemicals are stored. Spill kits can be purchased through most supply vendors that sell chemicals or safety supplies.

Second, check the kits once a month to ensure the safety seals are not broken. If they are not intact, check the contents to make sure they're all there. Absorbents, personal protective

equipment, and clean-up materials should be complete and match the contents list. This is a simple process that should be part of your regular preventative maintenance program.

How to save water when a pressure line breaks

Most plant water lines pump at a rate of hundreds of gallons per minute. A mental image of hundreds of gallons of water might be hard to visualize, until a hi-lo accidentally backs into a water line and suddenly water is gushing all over the place like a dam has burst.

In that situation, you don't need employees scrambling to find a shut-off, ANY SHUT-OFF! The way to prevent frantic searching, huge losses water, and more clean-up than necessary, is to have all water, air, and steam lines clearly labelled. Most companies are pretty good about labelling their electrical lines, but for some reason stop there. Bad decision.



Label all lines, and make sure shut-offs are clearly marked. The process of labelling lines and shut-offs will also identify places where you should install an extra valve or two.

How to find help fast when you really need it

When a roof leak gives your production line a surprise shower during a Sunday thunderstorm, does your crew know who to call for an emergency repair? If a hydraulic leak shuts down production, who's your designated emergency machine repairman?

Every plant needs a list of emergency resources and phone numbers that's posted in an obvious place, such as next to the maintenance department. It can be as simple as a vinyl letter board with quick change letters. Or, a glass-enclosed bulletin board with a clearly printed list in large type, prominently displayed, works fine too.

If you or your maintenance supervisor prefer to get the calls, put those phone number there. The important thing is that the staff knows who to call in a jam to get things fixed fast.

How to live a happy, contented life

Set up a thorough, recurring preventative maintenance plan. No, we're not kidding. A PM program is so basic and so easy to do that it's easy to overlook. It even sounds boring. But make no mistake: a PM program will give you a better return for the investment, and make life in the plant easier, than practically any other maintenance initiative.

PM reduces the incidence of premature breakdowns, lowers repair, maintenance, and utility costs, improves machine efficiencies, and prevents a lot of night and weekend calls about problems in the plant. You will get



fewer phone calls that make you wonder, "Oh man, what is it *this* time?!" All which will make for a happier ending to every day.

Take the time to set up a PM program on your own, or give us a call and we'll be happy to do it for you. We can set up a maintenance schedule, order parts, make repairs, measure results, whatever you need. But whether we do it, or you do it on your own, we have only one request: just PM it!



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