

Regular Maintenance: An Essential Public Relations Strategy



If you're not maintaining your system, get ready for your television camera close-up. Three companies made the news recently. The camera crews came knocking because something went wrong and the results were....explosive.

One company found a TV crew at their front door after an explosion sparked a fire that caused the entire plant to be evacuated. The cause? A blower bearing caught on fire, sending sparks down a duct jammed with years of caked on paper dust build-up. A spark lodged into the leading edge of the dust cake and the blowers kept running until the bearing melted the shaft. Keeping up with dust-related housekeeping (the NFPA calls for an annual inspection of all ductwork for deposits of combustible dust) and routine blower bearing maintenance would have prevented this costly fire and embarrassing PR event.

Another company made the news when OSHA levied 24 citations and almost \$100,000 in fines after an employee lodged an anonymous complaint. One of the six health-related OSHA violations was for failing to maintain an environment free of combustible dust, thus creating an explosion hazard as well as respiratory risks to employees. The culprit? In order to cut costs, the company had opted to go with a low-cost trim collection supplier who had installed an undersized dust filter.

For officials at a powdered metals manufacturer, bad press was the least of their worries after five workers were killed and three were injured in three separate flash fire and explosion incidents. Significant amounts of fine metal powder had accumulated in the plant over time. Officials knew that the dust was combustible yet failed to take action to reduce the hazards. The company could have avoided this public relations nightmare and the multiple lawsuits they face by working with a contractor that specializes in the removal of combustible dust rather than the general mechanical contractor they selected.

In all three cases, simple attention to basic NFPA and OSHA regulations, housekeeping and maintenance could have prevented these embarrassing catastrophes. And in two cases, reliance on low-cost local general contractors backfired and what appeared to be the low-cost solution ended up costing far more than the recommendations from contractors who specialize in combustible dust handling systems.

Are you ready for your television camera close-up?

Questions? For more information, give G.F. Puhl a call at 615.230.9500 or email us at sales@gfpuhl.com.