

Emerging changes in EH&S functions at the plant

... and mainstreaming Sustainable Development

My recent involvement in IBC's Fourth Environmental Management Information Systems (EMIS) Conference in San Diego provided insights about the changing roles of people in the plants.

A culture change is gaining momentum that puts the EH&S functions at the plant level. This will make EH&S everyone's responsibility and impact the way people are educated and do their work. Information technology (IT) is an enabler that provides tools to allow this culture change to occur.

Change in management practices will also be needed to be successful at mainstreaming EH&S management into plant operations.

The drivers

The NET and supplier consolidations in industry are two areas to watch as business and technology trends merge, according to Dr. Thomas Tuffey, Editor of *EMIS Tech Newsletter*.

Competitiveness is a key driver and the companies that can reinvent themselves and relate EH&S to the bottom line are going to be the winners.

While the enterprisewide systems are being put primarily into the larger firms at this time, Scott Peoples, president of Radian International Software, believes it is just a matter of time until they are adopted by the small- and medium-sized chemical companies.

The key driver here is consistency of information. Future trends in enterprisewide EMIS implementation include:

- Integration of EH&S software with core business applications;
- Staff mix improved through standardization of business applications;
- Tighter integration with core business activities.

New options emerging

We are now moving from PCs to the Internet, much as we previously went from mainframes to PCs. While limited, the cost of an Intranet system is much lower than using an enterprisewide system and provides considerable flexibility.

For example, Dan Wilkowsky outlined how National Semiconductor uses its EH&S Intranet to provide rapid access to information for its plants around the world. Now, instead of having, say, 30 dedicated environmental professionals, there are a few thousand users that have access to needed information.

A number of innovations are foreseen for the workplace, e.g.:

- IT tools are providing opportunities for people to become

more strategic rather than tactical in their approaches to problem solving;

- As EH&S is driven to the plant level, people will need new skill sets. As such, interactive ROM may become especially useful as people will not need to leave the plant sites.

Culture changes in motion

An additional glimpse at the future of corporate cultures

was gleaned from the April 1998 Conference on Corporate EH&S Excellence in New York City. The movement toward Sustainable Development principles is requiring a new way of thinking about the role of corporations within society.

One of the most striking examples of a culture change that is occurring as business positions itself for the next century is seen in the actions of The British Petroleum Co.

In an address by BP's European Managing Director, Christopher Gibson-Smith, he observed "... what we have had to do in the 1990s in order to retain our license to operate, was to change the culture in which we operated—indeed, our entire conceptual approach to our business."

During the past 12 months, BP has played a prominent part in the global debate on climate change, arguing that the time has come for precautionary action even though the science is still provisional. Gibson-Smith went on to state that "The new context in which a resource-based company such as BP will be operating, as far out as we can see, is 'Sustainable Development.'" See page 16 for in-depth coverage of BP's forward-looking views, which could be setting a new standard for the industry.

So we have much to look forward to as business, technology and social values merge and evolve. We will continue to keep you posted. Let us know how you've been affected.



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