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TRAINING AND HEALTH & SAFETY

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It's that T word again. Don't worry I won't use it in the first line because there are even more scary initials H and S. There is a wicked streak in those who must be obeyed to combine these two topics in the same month. Having passed the buck to the editorial board we need to think very carefully about the mutually dependent topics of Training and Health and Safety.

The industry is faced with an onrush of new legislation and developing technologies. There are two approaches. Ignore it all and soldier on until you expire, or use it as a driver for improving company performance. (Thank heavens for the DSPA)

After aeons working in the printing industry I have come to the conclusion that the inhibiting emotion on both Training and health and Safety is fear. Fear of the authorities and the fear of recognising that we have not fully understood the process or technology being used. Any successful individual will tell you that to achieve success they have to overcome fear of failure.

Everybody has horror stories about Health and Safety and be assured having worked the Far East and Africa I can probably top most of them. These industries are often fifty years behind European standards that is to some extent excusable as they know no better but in our home industry we can still be twenty years adrift. This not caused by ignorance it is more arrogance of the shop floor and that fear reflex of their management. To comply with the law Health and Safety audits are carried and the recommendations are often ignored until two weeks before the next audit. All some companies achieve is paper protection where reality is camouflaged with vacuous tick boxes and meaningless Mission Statements. Cynical, who me? No realistic. This really does not have to be so. Real acceptance of Health and Safety best practice demonstrates a competent workforce a capable management and a profitable company.

During a recent seminar I asked if those present had read the Material Safety Data Sheets of the inks being used in the company and ALL those involved in managing or using inks had done so. This was a first. So what was different about this company? It was not a traditional printing company. Their business was the production of very sophisticated electronic circuitry using the screen printing process. Inks to them were potentially hazardous chemicals. To them the aroma of volatile aromatic carbons (VOC's) and fugitive monomers were not something they had grown to accept, they quite rightly want a safe environment for every member of staff. None of them had seen a time served printer unscrew the cap of a tin of thinners wash his hands with the contents and breath in the fumes as he did so. Even the hardened solvent sniffer found the resulting dermatitis really unpleasant. If you wash your hands with solvent you might



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as well stick a hypodermic needle in your vein and pump the solvent right in. (Don't even think of doing it.) We wear patches to dose ourselves with nicotine when trying to give up smoking. Hormones used in contraception can be taken in through the skin; solvents can be absorbed straight into the bloodstream through the skin. Be warned, there are people who have suffered irreparable damage to their nervous system by such a practice. In our industry the greatest number of injuries are caused by manual handling at 33%, slips and trips 25%. When you think about it, it is not surprising. All those stacks of substrate to move, large screen frames to hoist about, wet floors in stencil production, pallets and waste substrate lying on the floor a veritable gymnasium of lifting and a steeplechase of obstacles.

With all but few exceptions Health and Safety is the application common sense but then is many individuals common sense is decidedly uncommon. A tidy work area, well maintained equipment, effective guarding, observing the recommendations of the MSDS, the correct personal protective equipment. As we hear so often this is not rocket science.

I do find it strange that if, on industrial premises, we were to heat a flammable liquid to just below its flash point over a naked flame and then plunge in material dripping in water producing steam that creates a mist of the flammable liquid causing the occasional explosion so destroying the building and killing the occupants, we would be locked up. Some people do it every night when they make chips in their kitchen at home. Just imagine forcing employees to inhale tars, carbon monoxide, nicotine and other carcinogens. "Fancy a fag?"

Life is full of these contradictions but we have the legislation to guide us in the workplace. It is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that can be the source for this. I have been reading lately that the HSE are changing their approach. Rather than acting as enforcers they are aiming to provide support and guidance. Their web site <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/plans/sh2.htm> explains the philosophy and shows how they are working with Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME's,) which is most of us. There is a site specifically aimed at the printing industry and it is crammed with really useful stuff. Go to <http://www.hse.gov.uk/printing/index.htm> . As screen printers the prime source of information for our industry is the Digital and Screen Printing Association. They have an excellent CD that details precisely what your responsibilities are regarding Health and Safety. What is really useful it takes you through the procedures in easy to understand language. At £100.00 for non-members and £50.00 for members it is a bargain. Go to www.dspa.co.uk and fill in the contact form requesting the CD or ring Mike Turner on 01737 240792, get your copy today.

"Don't tell 'em I don't want the rascals (censored) to know more than me," was said to me by a Technical Director in a screen printing company. Fortunately he is no longer working in the industry. Unfortunately this attitude is still common. It could be titled "Institutional Ignorance." One of the reasons Digital Printing has taken such a grip in the screen printing industry, and very positive it is, is that the level of true skill available has been limited. We have plenty of techniques for "Keeping it going," "Fixing the problems,"



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“Dealing with the variables.” Many exponents have developed high levels of skill in resolving problems they themselves have created. “It takes twenty years to learn how to screen print,” rubbish! It takes months to reach a standard that will meet the needs of the market, if you are given the knowledge, understanding and practical training. And, heaven forefend some of the best printers I have met have been – Whisper it– Women! The printer should be aiming to improve the performance of his/her press, reduce downtime and set up to a minimum and eliminate rejects altogether. People still haven’t grasped that down time is lost sales opportunity. It can never be recovered. The cost of rejects is misunderstood. The cost of rejects come off your bottom line. 5% is a generous profit level in our industry, at that rate you need to reprint twenty good sheets to recover the cost of one reject sheet. That is scary. What is worse is that the people who do the work have no idea of the cost implications.

Until the day comes when printing is simply about pushing a button, nearly there with digital, we need skilled origination technicians, stencil technicians and print technicians. If the origination is produced with inappropriate profiles and line rulings we are chasing our tail. Stencil production is the foundation of the process if this is out of specification you are stuffed. A misinformed printer can screw up all the good work that has gone before. You have to give the information, they have to be experts in their field and have a darned good understanding of what goes on in other departments that they work with. If you were to speak to any trainer who gathers people together from different departments to impart knowledge, one of the comments would be that what the learners gain a great deal from is the opportunity to talk with members of other departments about how they interact or more often than not how they don’t communicate.

Take the risk give them the knowledge. Fuji Sericol have an excellent training school, Sun Chemicals and Nor-Cote are only too happy to run courses for you. Of course you could always contact the DSPA who deliver training and qualifications. Their most recent addition is an Internet based e-learning course accredited by FESPA as the European Standard for e learning, it is already being translated into 6 European languages as well as English. It is targeted at Graphics and POS printers, there is just stacks of information available on the course for novices and experts. Can’t be bad. Whatever route you wish to take, just do it.