

## CHECKLIST from page 18

- Have standard operating procedures been established for spills?
- Where needed for emergency use, are respirators stored in a convenient, clean and sanitary location?
- Are employees prohibited from eating in areas where hazardous chemicals are present?
- Is personal protective equipment provided, used and maintained?
- Are there standard operating procedures for the selection and use of respirators?
- Are employees instructed in the correct use of respirators, and are the respirators NIOSH-approved?
- Do you have a medical or biological monitoring system?
- Are you familiar with the Threshold Limit Values or Permissible Exposure Limits of airborne contaminants?

- Do employees complain about dizziness, headaches, nausea, irritation, or other factors of discomfort when using chemicals?
- Is there a dermatitis problem?
- Have you considered using an industrial hygienist or environmental health specialist to evaluate your operation?
- Is there a list of hazardous substances used in your workplace?
- Is there a written hazard communication program dealing with Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs), labeling and employee training?
- Is each hazardous substance container labeled with product identity and a hazard warning?
- Is there a MSDS readily available for each hazardous substance?
- Is there an employee training program for hazardous substances?

# Surviving crises in the workplace

by Ed Wandtke

■ Most of us are aware of the feelings and emotions we experience when being told a family member has died, or have received a call to go to a hospital because an injured friend is being rushed there.

When a crisis occurs, all other concerns come to a sudden halt.

With changing technology, a smarter workforce and more dependence on high technology, we have become dependent on technological innovations. The price for technological advancements may be an increased opportunity for a crisis.

Learning how to plan for, and deal with, crises often helps to simplify the crisis when it occurs. You, as an owner/manager, can take several steps to make crises easier to deal with:

**1) Plan for the unexpected.** You might deal with unexpected problems each day: a sudden weather change, a sick technician, a truck accident. All of these situations can cause a crisis, but if you have advance contingency plans, you will find these crises are only inconveniences. For example, having an extra truck available and an extra technician for the busy season is a good way to ensure that work gets done.

**2) Recognize emotion when it impacts you on the job.** We often pretend that emotions don't influence us in our business actions, especially in this male-dominated green industry. But when a crisis does occur at work, emotions really come into full view. Don't let these emotions take over and rule your actions.

Remember, you need to remain as objective and as understanding as possible.

**3) Recognize the supporting cast.** When the company successfully survives a crisis, sometimes the managers get most of the credit. But if your company is faced with hard times, your employees are the ones who often pick up the slack and pull it through. Giving your employees the recognition they deserve is a sign of a company that knows the true value of an employee.

**4) Handle change with flexible employees.** It is amazing how well we can deal with change. When weather influ-

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## Employees can be a source of strength when the company goes through an unfortunate and/or unexpected turn of events.

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ences a planned activity on a given day, we are forced to change the schedule. Most companies have learned to deal with change, and many owners even put extra stress on their companies when they change their minds from morning to evening. Make sure, as owner, that you strive to be consistent. Employees are asked to deal with enough change, so owners should be the stability they can count on.

**5) Don't create your own crises.** One aspect of most businesses is the need for

secrets and confidential information. "Who knows what" is often a very disconcerting situation among employees. If someone is being fired and someone else finds out in advance, distrust is provoked. Employees like to know where they stand in order to feel in control of their own destinies.

**6) Keep your goals in aim.** Often, a crisis will cause many employees to suddenly rush to solve a new and unusual problem. Who then takes command to refocus the employees back on goals? In many companies I have seen too much time wasted on activities that will not increase profitability or goal achievement. Many companies, however, have found that using an industry-experienced consultant to be effective. The tips and suggestions you receive from such an individual can help you dispose of useless activities and help keep you and your employees focused.

Crisis, though infrequent, can be a real trial. Learning how to deal with a crisis, having an individual ready to back up your positions, and knowing when to seek outside help can make crisis resolution easier.

Remember, crises usually happen when you think you have every base covered. Advance planning and knowing where to get assistance will help your make it through whatever might arise and make your company more resilient.

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