



Where in the World is Paul Nugent?

PAUL NUGENT | MNOP

Communication Breakdown...

It's easy to be clever after the event. The oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is a disaster for the environment and most likely for the local economies too; but it may also be a major disaster for BP as investigators and lawyers start second guessing and reinterpreting company history. Accidents happen in every industry, indeed every company, and some could have been avoided with the right decision. Which areas should managers focus on? Things that might happen (disaster planning) or things that are actually happening? In critical industries, disaster planning is a must and it may yet transpire that things were overlooked or ignored in the Gulf, but in normal day-to-day operations managers are often more focused on putting out fires and managing changes in their business, whether up or down. However, when something serious does go wrong, how many of us would like to have a spotlight shining on every action and test we are using to try and fix it? How many fixes have you used to solve a problem which worked first time? Usually it is a series of fixes and given the extremities that the engineers are working in under the Gulf, theirs are most likely to be novel and untested. It appears that some early warning signs during capping of the well-head were ignored or misread: whether it was a communication breakdown or deliberate action no doubt we will see the media frenzy dissect and pontificate over for some time yet. Let's hope we spend as much time on cleaning up the mess.



Hagia Sofia - built in 537 AD! A Byzantine marvel.

...it's Always the Same

Hopefully no rotomolder faces the same level of disaster but everyone faces customer problems and operational issues which could have been prevented if someone had read the warning signs. While it's just as easy for people to be clever after the fact in rotomolding, the really clever approach is to put systems in place to try and catch as many problems as possible in the first place. With the amazing variety of industries, parts, and applications that rotomolded parts are used for, it's impossible to catch everything, but there are some key steps in the process that everyone should address. Try to make sure that you have simple regular controls at the four stages listed below. The tests are not complex or time-consuming and the equipment needed



to carry them out is relatively low-cost but I guarantee you that they will save you the hassle of being in the BP spotlight for most basic rotomolding issues. Hey, they might even make your operation look good.

Powder Quality (Daily): it is the simplest of tests but it is amazing how many molders do not use it: powder dry flow tells you so much about the quality of your powder and also helps demonstrate to operators the relationship between powder quality and flow in the mold. Particle size distribution is nice to have in general but essential if you grind material in-house.

Process Stability (Daily): check your oven temperatures for speed of recovery and consistency, check your rotation settings at the arm match what it says on the control panel, measure temperatures either in or on the mold, and generally make sure that you know what your parts are being subjected to.

Part Thickness (Daily): there is a weak point in every part and while not every part is subjected to loads or is critical, it is good to know that you have consistent parts. A simple ultrasonic thickness gauge can be used to identify the critical points that need checking every time.

Part Performance (Weekly or As-Needed): check your cure with impact testing. Visual inspection is fine, but there are so many variables involved in reaching this point (142 if anyone remembers) including pigmentation and molding parameters that you really need to have some hard data to support your assessment. It is not that difficult and doesn't need to be carried out every day.

Four simple check-points, four opportunities for communication to all involved that all is well, four times more data than many molders currently have. Remember, if everyone is expecting, but no-one is inspecting, expect to see problems.

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