

Process Safety Stories!

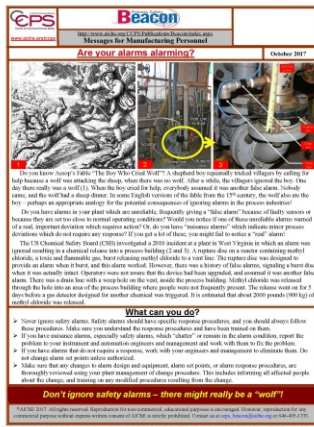
January 2019

The power of story-telling has been recognized for centuries as an effective way to impact the brain and the heart, and to preserve history. Children throughout the world learn fairy tales from collections such as Mother Goose, Grimm's Fairy Tales, Aesop's Fables, and others. They remember these stories, and lessons from them, throughout their lives.

Process safety pioneer Trevor Kletz (1922–2013) often wrote about the value of stories in process safety. People remember stories, and they remember them much more reliably than lectures on process hazards and other training materials. Fortunately the process industries have made significant progress in reducing the frequency of major incidents. In the past, people working in process facilities gained a healthy respect



Aesop's Fable of the Raven and the Pitcher reminds us of the value of creativity.



The October 2017 Beacon is based on Aesop's Fable of the Boy Who Cried Wolf.

for process hazards by personally experiencing what can happen when a process is not properly controlled. Without that experience, we rely on training, drills, and procedures on how to go about our daily work safely. When there is no good connection between “what to do” and “why we do it that way” we can become complacent. Why do we have to follow all of these process safety management procedures to prevent incidents that never happen? We forget that incidents do not happen so often because we are following the required procedures. Procedures become vulnerable to not being followed rigorously. Complacency and failure to follow procedures are some of the first steps on a path leading to a future incident.

What Can You Do?

- If you have many years of experience in the process industries, you remember stories of past incidents which you directly experienced, or which were told by your predecessors. Share these stories with your less experienced colleagues. Remind them that “it can happen here” because “it has happened” in the past.
- If you are relatively new to the process industries, ask your veteran colleagues to share their past experiences with process safety incidents.
- Suggest to management that they write down or otherwise document stories to preserve memories of past incidents before they are lost as people move to other jobs or retire.
- Look for stories about incidents which occur in any industry, and figure out what you can learn from them that relates to your job. Many Beacons are examples of how a seemingly unrelated incident can provide important lessons for our industry. Some examples include a fire on a passenger boat (Sept. 2016, management of change), an engine failure on an airplane (Oct. 2018, mechanical integrity and hazardous energy), and a fire in Atlanta airport (Dec. 2018, emergency response and common cause failures).

“Stories are where memories go when they are forgotten.”

- Doctor Who, Series 9, Episode 12

©AIChE 2019. All rights reserved. Reproduction for non-commercial, educational purposes is encouraged. However, reproduction for any commercial purpose without express written consent of AIChE is strictly prohibited. Contact us at ccps_beacon@aiche.org or 646-495-1371.