

People are a critical part of safe operations.

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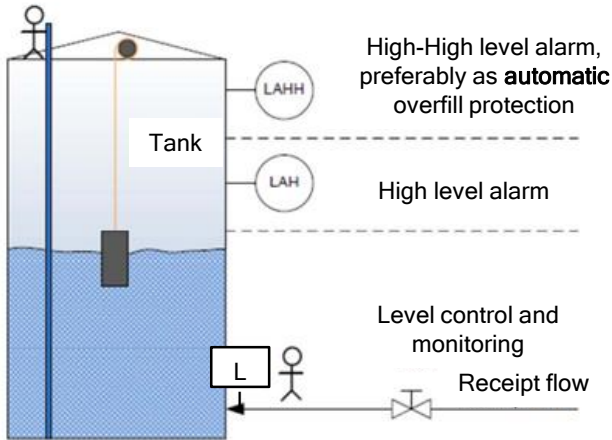


Figure 1: Tank level monitoring options from CSB report 2010.02.I.PR (Fig. 13)

A company was performing a hazard and risk assessment on their flammable liquid tank farm. While reviewing the safety systems, the setpoint of the high-high level alarm was questioned. The engineer (meekly) replied that this point was at 99% of the tank height. If this was true, during filling, the tank could overflow before the high-high alarm could warn the operator and action could be taken to stop flow. The team recognized this as a very serious gap and stopped the PHA.

A small team of maintenance employees checked the high-high position on several tanks and found that they were positioned to activate at 99%. A temporary procedure was implemented to safely fill the tanks until new level devices could be installed at the proper level.

The only reason the plant had not experienced overflowing of tanks was a single administrative control. The person who ordered bulk solvents carefully monitored tank levels and solvent consumption, then would only order the quantity to fill the tank to the 85% level. This single layer of protection was entirely based on the performance of an individual, but the ordering criteria was not documented in a procedure.

Did You Know?

- In the hierarchy of controls, a properly designed engineering safeguard (e.g. high-level shutoff system) is more reliable, (stronger) than an administrative safeguard (an operator manually closing valves in response to the high-level alarm).
- Engineering controls need to be properly designed, installed and maintained (inspected, calibrated and tested).
- When a safeguard is based on administrative control, these attributes are required:
 - A procedure is required to document proper actions and sequence.
 - The operators must be trained on how to safely follow the procedure.
 - The operators must be able to demonstrate that they can perform the task as documented.
- All safeguards, engineering or administrative, must be able to respond quickly enough to avoid the undesirable event; it is meant to prevent or to minimize the impacts if it did occur.

What Can You Do?

- When working on a process, you need to understand the safety systems and their function so you can properly respond when an upset occurs.
- If during rounds or operation, you discover a safeguard is not working properly, report it immediately. You never know when it will be needed.
- When participating in hazard reviews such as a PHA, do not hesitate to point out deficiencies in safety systems.

Safeguards need to work, be strong enough & fast enough !