

# People Over Profit? Fool Me Once

CARRIE ELLIS, Editor



By CARRIE ELLIS, Editor

Prioritizing profit over people: The implications of this seemingly popular trend are not limited to the processing market, but the severity of the implications are amplified here. Whether we like it or not, safety must be of the utmost concern in this industry — be it for the worker bee or the consumer. One thing is for sure, it better not affect the queen bee (or her bottom line), who is generally untouched by the reality of perilous everyday operations, overseeing everything, instead, from the safety of her hive.

The public is fed up with companies like BP and Johnson & Johnson as illustrated by the contemporary definitions for each company's acronym: "beyond pitiful" (per its Deepwater Horizon disaster) and a "jilted & jaded" consumer base (per 11 recalls ranging from Children's Benadryl to contact lenses to hip implants). The fact that the most egregious offenders — lately some industry giants — are the ones that escape the cutting room floor, however, should not lead to even a little bit of complacency in our own facilities.

The Associated Press (AP) recently reported that, "Members of Congress, industry experts and workers who survived the rig explosion have accused BP's engineers of cutting corners to save time and money on a project that was 43 days and more than \$20 million behind schedule at the time of the blast."

A separate AP article discussing BP's internal findings quotes Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., "Of [BP's] own eight key findings, they only explicitly take responsibility for half of one. BP is happy to slice up the blame, as long as they get the smallest piece."

And so I ask, where are our priorities? Arguably, a company's objective is to always stay profitable. But how do you rationalize a multi-million dollar company that still

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Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

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prioritizes profit over the safety of its personnel or customer base, without whom a company would not have an opportunity of becoming profitable at all? BP spent \$93 million on advertising from April to July of this year (three times greater than the same time last year) to keep up its charade of transparency, but I think its real intention was to bolster its reputation following a major downturn in fuel sales at BP-branded gas stations.

In a separate scenario, what happens when these companies go overboard in regard to their product's claims, potentially putting their customer base at risk? Within the processing market, these issues can range from one extreme — unapproved FDA uses for pharmaceutical drugs, for example — to another — the self-regulated safety of an oil-drilling vessel.

This is where we come in as proponents for both safety and the balance sheet. There must be a middle man (or woman) who can bridge the interests of the employees, and the investors or owners. It's a precarious balance, but without any balance at all, the situation exponentially worsens. If a business works to boost its value without any regard to safety, it would eventually be offset by way of a fine or a disaster.

Yes, the processing industry offers consumers a lot of perks (life-saving drugs from pharmaceutical companies, safer buildings and more rugged products from the metals and mining marketplaces, agricultural chemicals that save farmers money and back-breaking labor, the glue that safely holds our children's toys together, etc.), but alongside these benefits are an entire slew of potential safety pitfalls. And not only are we still hitting these pitfalls, we're hitting them with voracity.

To allow profit to take precedent over people is a dangerous prospect, no matter the size or type of company. If you're fooled into thinking safety is other people's problems only, then shame on you. If you're lulled into a false sense of security within your own plant, then shame on me.

*Where does your allegiance lie? Is it a management or a personnel problem? More importantly, what to do? Send me your insider opinions and prospective solutions at [carrie.ellis@advantagemedia.com](mailto:carrie.ellis@advantagemedia.com) [1].*

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