Dreaming of Foreign Object Damage

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I recently had the pleasure of traveling to Dallas at the request of Snap-On, the well-known manufacturer of all things tooling. At the event, they educated me and other members of the press on a tool crib that takes all of the hassle out of asset management. All tools removed from the crib are automatically detected by the system. Primarily, this prevents technicians from losing tools, and provides an on-the-record database of who would be responsible. But Snap-On's kind marketing crew kept on using an unfamiliar phrase: FOD. Foreign object damage.

Some members of the aviation press were along for the ride—so to speak—and this term meant everything to them. Not surprisingly, foreign object damage on an airplane could lead to disaster. Much of our first afternoon was spent discussing the awful consequences of FOD in a commercial aircraft. I was inundated with stories worthy of being James Cameron-backed disaster films, like mechanics leaving something as small as a 3/8" socket near or inside a turbine, which tore the entire thing apart.

Of course, all of this left me a little more leery of my flight home. I used to be fine flying as a kid — carefree in whatever book I was reading at the time, or sleeping — but now that I'm older, and have obligations abound (fiancée, finances, and more), I get a little more riled up. I'm sure that any turbulence is about to tear off the wings, and whenever the pilot dips the nose down — even just a fraction — to descend, I start to believe we're starting a genuine nosedive.

One of the few things that helps calm me down is the knowledge that the entire journey of the plane — from manufacturing to my flight — was conducted with safety as the most critical concern. From the masses of incredibly smart engineers, to the craftsmen and women who built the plane piece by piece, I know that there

was a genuine effort to make the best product possible. And while I don't know much about the maintenance crews who work on the planes, my peers in the aviation business seem confident that they, too, take their jobs seriously enough to prevent most avoidable incidents.

Industrial maintenance specialists still have to worry about FOD. A motor overhaul could turn into a new motor purchase if an employee can't account for all of their tools after the job is finished. But they should count themselves lucky that their FOD doesn't lead to such disastrous consequences, when compared to our aviation brethren. There's little chance a plant maintenance crew will kill a few hundred people because of a simple mistake.

In a way, *IMPO*'s readers should be thankful that they don't have these issues on their minds when doing maintenance work. But when the pressure's off, issues might become more prevalent.

As a news aggregator in our daily *IMPO Insider*, we try to tone down, as much as possible, stories about unfortunate incidents in manufacturing plants around the country. We don't want to be the equivalent of "Scared Straight" for the nations' maintenance crews. On the other hand, it's important to maintain a reverence for issues of safety on the plant floor.

Take a moment to think about everything that goes into your daily production. All the people, the machines, your suppliers, and the maintenance that you put in to keep everything running. If you're not completely confident about that aggregate's ability to consistently manufacture and maintain safely, it's time to act. If you're worried about any little issue turning into a nosedive, you should take steps to fix it. Just be grateful that there's something you *can* do, unlike my worrisome self, white-knuckled and sweating, as I nervously wait to land.

Have similar fears? Share them with me at joel.hans@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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