Hazmat Picnic

Marlyn Huwe, Maintenance Clerk,Yaskawa Electric America

Can you imagine having a picnic during a full blown hazmat incident? Well I had a front row seat. On a record setting hot and humid day in early June, production was in full swing at Yaskawa Electric America, Inc. located in Buffalo Grove Illinois. Located right next to the large warehouse and production for servo motors were railroad tracks still used by freight trains .On this day several tank cars sat roasting in the sun.

Mid-morning, strong fumes began to filter in through the open garage doors on the West side of the building left open for some relief of the growing temperature. Concerned senior management decided to call the fire department to check it out. Within minutes the call to evacuate shot through the building and a quick and orderly exodus began. Everyone assembled on the property next door and a roll call assured no one was left behind. It was like a parade as unit after unit arrived with full lights and sirens “over forty in all” recounts Craig Espevik, vice president of operations. People found shade and a piece of manicured lawn on the property of our new best neighbors at Vapor bus international. Their friendliness and understanding was greatly appreciated. A driver of a box truck that has been partnered with us for a long time offered to take staffers to a nearby mega store to buy bottled water, ice and other beverages for the wilting associates. About that time I was arriving from headquarters 12 miles away in Waukegan with as many six-foot folding table as I could carry in our company van. It just so happens that on this particular day the company had previously arranged for food to be delivered. I told the building manager that I got past the road block because I had a company logo on my truck and that I was the maintenance guy, but the food delivery was stuck at that blockade.

Every one pitched in and unloaded tables from the truck. Then she climbed in and we headed for the gatekeeper. I turned around as she negotiated with them. I not sure what was said but in my minds eye, or ear rather, it was probably something like our constitutional right to picnic.

The partition was moved and the food van followed in, as the water showed up, too. We rounded the bend as cheers erupted when we triumphantly entered the siege. Within a matter of moments the food was laid out and a party was on! As I stood there and looked around, it seemed like an old fashion church picnic some where in any little rural town.

I realized this was all possible for a few reasons: fostering good relations with our corporate neighbors and distribution partners; the fast response and professionalism of the local authorities; and most of all, cooperation and understanding from my fellow employees. That’s what makes this a great company

to work for, and as it turns out, the fumes were from a loose cap on a tanker filled with turpentine. So there was no grave threat or danger, but don't tell the news helicopter.

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