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SAFETY

Maintenance in the tissue field

As we all know, European legislation on health and safety in the workplace derives now from a sole community source. And the topic of maintenance finds increasingly greater relevance both in legislation as well as in the propaganda in favor of safety (it is the theme for this two-year period of the European week on safety). The principles established by the European legislator have a totally general valence; hence, the considerations that follow apply to any tissue converting company.

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The intent of this brief article is to reflect on what is necessary in terms of maintenance in order to ensure the safety of workers, in relation to the equipment used on the job (machines, systems, etc.) in the tissue field. In the course of these last few years, stimulated by the European directives and by governing law, we have found ourselves involved in the topic of maintenance under a different perspective from the one usually considered in this field. Indeed, today we speak of maintenance intended as maintaining conformity, and we can infer that, by the term maintenance, the legislator identifies the upkeep in time of the safety requirements of the equipment used on the job that is subject to influences that may cause deteriorations apt to give rise to situations of danger.

THROUGH THE PRESCRIPTIONS OF THE DIRECTIVES, the European Union actually indicates a procedure to be followed in order to ensure such requirement, i.e.:
- definition of assessment periods in accordance with the indications of manufacturers or, in their absence, with good practice norms;
- the assessments recording to be kept at the disposal of the competent authorities;
- level of preparation of the personnel who performs and records such assessments.

Besides surely being a clear management guide, it also constitutes a strong bond for certain companies that are in the condition of being unable to respect such requirements. We are speaking of work equipment subject to influences that can cause deteriorations; for example: ropes, harnesses, shackles, eyebolts, chucks, ladders & stairways, forklifts, overhead cranes, ecc.

IN OUR EXPERIENCE, by following the indications of the directives, we have applied the process indicated to the letter, following these steps:
- assessment of the work equipment present in the company (through census and analysis);
- collection of the manufacturer's information (use and maintenance manuals);
- creation of an assessment plan on the basis of the information extrapolated from the Manufacturer's Manual;
- creation of checklists to be recorded and kept at the disposal of the competent authorities;
- detection of personnel eligible to perform such assessments (internal and external);
- other activities (purely complimentary but that in any case allow a correct handling of the process.

Once the design phase is settled, we have gone on to the application phase, and here we realized (even though we already had an idea of this at the information collection phase) of how difficult it is to follow these requisites to the letter.
A clear example that speaks for all the others, but that obviously changes according to the company's organization, could be that of an operator who has to handle a reel of paper and place it on an unwinder (an operation that we presume takes place frequently during a working day). The operator must use the following work equipment: overhead crane, chucks, balancers.

Of course, this equipment must be the object of assessment and these assessments must be recorded.

HENCE OUR OPERATOR TAKES THE CHECKLISTS AND BEGINS THE ASSESSMENT (manufacturers' manuals state that a series of visual assessments should be performed before each use). When the assessment is finished, we rea-lize that the operator has filled in 4 sheets and, at best, he will not have to fill in others if he is the one who will be handling the other reels using the same equipment during the entire shift. The result is that, working on 3 shifts per day, he produces 12 records just for the indicated equipment. That makes a total of about 2500 records in a year (not counting the periodical assessments that are performed on a quarterly basis). And this is the most favo-rable condition. Just think what can happen if the operator performing this operation changes in the course of a shift.
Keeping these factors and the requirements of the directives in mind, how shall we behave? The solution adopted - which in our opinion is the most pursuable one - was to make an assessment of the risks of the handling activity in reference, with the aim of identifying situations that can cause deteriorations apt to give rise to dangerous activities, and for these, define actions to mitigate the risk involved - actions not based exclusively on organiza-tional measures, but also on technical ones.

FURTHERMORE, THE PERIODICITY OF THE CHECKS (quarterly) made by qualified personnel must be reduced to a weekly basis for particularly critical equipment, using company personnel trained on the assessments to be made, maybe working together with the staff of specialized companies and in accordance with company instructions that contain the objective criteria for assessment.
The ensemble of the actions undertaken must be indicated in the risk assessment document under the responsibili-ty of the Employer, produced with the collaboration of the Employees and of the Health and Safety General Managers. The conclusion is that surely what is to be done represents a huge leap forward with respect to when regulations governing this topic did not exist (just 2 years ago), even if the law requirement does not pay to the letter. •