

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

Persistence Gives Perspective To Protection



When someone is newly introduced to the world of fire protection, the first few months are usually consumed in learning the myriad of details that make up this new world. Sometime, usually within the first year, as the sheen of new experiences begins to wear off, it is quite common for that person to begin to seek to understand what might be called the philosophical underpinnings of fire protection.

"What makes fire protection efforts truly successful? Is it an investment of a great deal of money? Is it an investment of a great deal of human resources? What does it take to really provide proper protection?"

When a subject is as diverse and complex as fire protection, it should be no surprise that there is no simple answer to such questions. Yet experience gained by analyzing the historical roots of fire protection in the United States and Canada seems to always end up back at a single overriding quality: persistence.

Much to the chagrin of some of my friends in the fire protection commu-

nity, I have recently threatened to write a rap. This rap of mine would center around the word "persistence." I am so deeply convinced that persistence is the key element to the successful application of fire protection to any facility that I think to myself, "Why not write a rap about the word?"

Persistence gives perspective to protection.

When you start to make it happen, it just happens.

If you keep on keeping at it you will find that it will do.

Yes, persistence gives perspective to protection.

Oh, all right, I agree. This year's Grammy winner has little or nothing to fear from my erstwhile attempt. But, the message is valid just the same.

There is no question that the foundation on which all serious efforts to provide fire protection must be built is the commitment of the management of a facility to an aggressive program of fire prevention, fire protection, and fire control. Without this management commitment, there will be no long-term success.

It is also true that effective fire protection has wrapped within it a whole

lot of analysis and careful application of engineering principles. The specification, design, manufacture, installation, testing, maintenance, and use of any fire protection system requires diligence every step through the process, from the first to the last.

And, it does take a worthwhile investment of capital to buy the equipment, install it, and maintain it throughout the life of the building. But somehow, money alone is not enough to assure the effectiveness of fire protection.

You see it takes a day-by-day persistence to make certain that a building and its occupants are safe from the ravages of fire. It takes an ever-vigilant, never-resting, check-it-once-then-check-it-again persistence to apply fire protection and keep fire protection applied.

Years ago at a paper mill in Niagara Falls, NY, I met a plant fire chief named Walter Shugg. Walt must have been a fire chief because his hard hat was red? No, Walt Shugg was a fire chief because every day of his life, whether he was at the plant, or sitting in his easy chair at home, he persistently lived in a reality where fire protection was all-important.

As a footnote in history, it would be somewhat interesting for you to know, that the relationship between insurer and insured seemed a bit different in those days. For example, we insurance company inspectors arrived at a plant unannounced to do our inspection. In the case of a paper worker, like the plant of which I am speaking, we made our inspections every three months.

And, it was clearly understood by both parties that the purpose of our inspection was to protect our interests as an insurance company. There certainly was benefit to the insured by having us audit their own loss prevention activities. But the real purpose of the visit was to protect the interests of our owners who had allowed us to extend their financial strength to our customers through a property insurance contract.

In any case, Walt was a joy to work with. I would only have to point out the

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