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Safety Budgets: Deciding Which Hazards to Control

Some companies have no specific safety budgets and give little thought to systematically identifying, evaluating and selecting reliable hazard controls. They simply put their heads in the sand.

Some companies establish safety budgets and work within their established financial constraints to control hazards. Certainly we cannot ignore the economics of injury prevention and hazard control and still remain viable and competitive. Nevertheless, some companies have established safety budgets which are far too little in comparison to the dangers in the workplace.

Some companies have given serious thought to hazard control and have established reasonable safety budgets. But what is a business decision maker to do when they learn of a risk of injury that could lead to catastrophic injury or death that can be controlled quite easily but the money has not been budgeted? This is not only a moral and ethical question, it is a legal and business question as well.

After having investigated over 500 serious injury and death cases which occurred in workplaces throughout the United States over the last 30 years, I realized that sometimes callous, cruel business decisions are made by good people who simply do not face this safety question head on. They might say that the money has not been budgeted and think they are therefore off the hook. But if someone suffers catastrophic injury or death, it is likely that a lawsuit will shed clear light on the decision making process and the economics of the decision not to spend the money to prevent the catastrophe.

It can be very embarrassing to have to answer under oath in front of the family members of the victim that your reason for not spending the money to prevent injury was because the "money was not budgeted".

When significant risks of injury and death exist, it is often not a matter of "if", but a matter of "when" the incident will occur. Thank God we wake up every morning and are able to make decisions that put priority on human life over profit. The will to find the money to control the hazard will be found quite easily after the first serious injury or death occurs. But we don't have to wait for a tragedy to find the money to prevent exposure to a hazard that could lead to catastrophic injury or death.