C. F. Gillard and Associates
Consultants to the Process Industries

3845 Olympia Dr.
Houston, Texas
(713) 871-9797

PROCESS PROGRESS JANUARY 2010

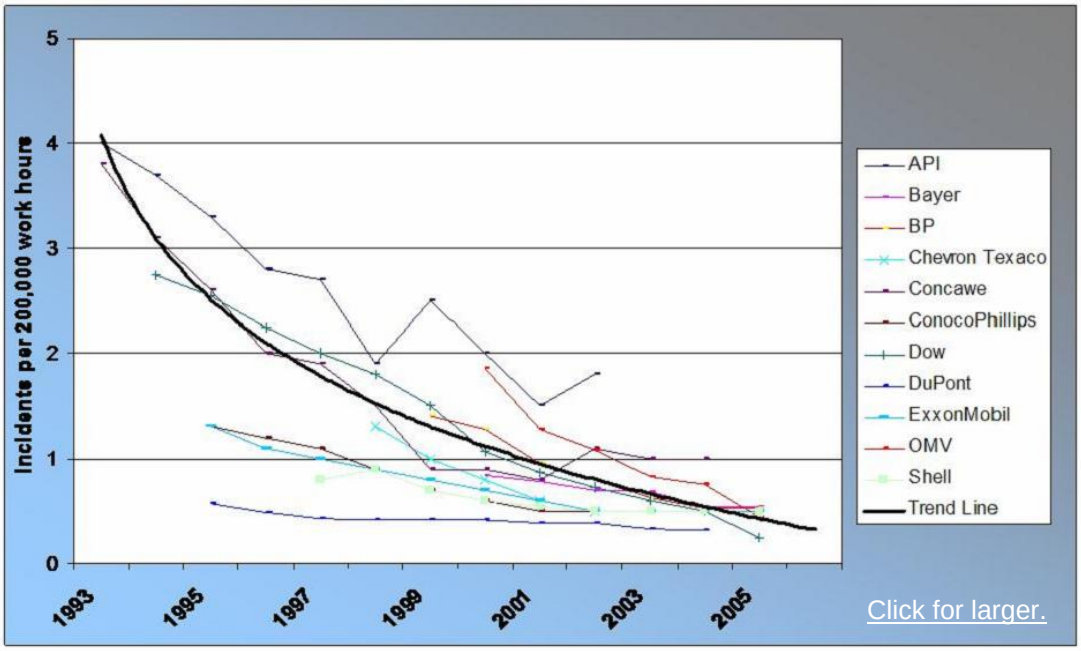
Industry Safety Performance

Last month the Newsletter regretted a fatality from an explosion of a boiler at a local refinery and discussed how to avoid these kinds of fires and explosions.

Now we want to celebrate industry's success in improving safety performance.

The chart below shows the industry safety performance over the last thirteen years.

Safety Performance for Major Process Industry Companies



Source: PITBLADO, R. (2008),"Global Process Industry Initiatives to Reduce Major Accident Hazards" 11th Annual Symposium, Mary Kay Process Safety Center

A chart that covered a longer period would show the same trend and be even more impressive. Although different metrics were used, safety performance has improved continuously and dramatically for the last thirty years.

Many of us have been concerned that the safety performance data is driven by minor personal injuries — cuts and bruises —and that the process safety and serious incident performance may not have improved. The article cited for the chart above includes a review of investigations of this and their mixed results. Unfortunately the performance on major incidents is not equal to the performance on minor injuries and illness.

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Despite the points above, I am still concerned about the plateau and left wanting a new approach that can move performance to a substantial improvement and wondering if there isn't a breakthrough waiting to be discovered.

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The Next Breakthrough

I believe a breakthrough in safety performance, particularly a reduction in major incident is possible. However a fresh approach is needs. The current methods will result in gradual improvement but substantial incidents will continue to occur at an troublesome frequency. Perhaps the example below from the medial profession provides an new approach.

What We Are Reading

We have been reading **Super Freakonomics** by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. We're not alone this book is quite popular and is a follow-up to their earlier bestseller, **Freakonomics**.

One part that is especially interesting is the description of the struggle to get medical doctors to wash their hands. Despite overwhelming evidence for many years that failure to wash hands causes infections in hospitals, the emergence of drug resistance bacteria, and many substantial efforts over a number of years, the medical profession had very limited success in getting doctors to actually wash their hands.

Signs didn't work, nagging didn't work and "requirements" didn't work. No new technology emerged to solve the problem.

A breakthrough has finally been achieved at Cedars-Sinai, one of the world's leading hospitals in Los Angeles. At a lunch meeting of the Chief of Staff Advisory Board discussing the problem the hospital epidemiologist ask the twenty people there to culture their hand. The cultures showed hands covered with bacteria. The hand prints were put on the hospital computers as screen savers. Hand-washing compliance jumped to nearly 100 percent.

Could a similar approach be used in the process industries?

Several people have asked for access to previous Newsletters. They can be accessed by clicking here: Archive.

C. F. Gillard and Associates are consultants to the Process Industries providing assistance in process engineering, operations management methods and systems, IT strategies and project scoping and implementation, and plant management.

charles.gillard@cfgillard.com | http://cfgillard.com | (713) 871-9797

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