

False Sense of Security

By Bruce Hemenway, Training Specialist

As happens in most families today, after our children are raised, some of them move away from where they were raised and away from the rest of the family.

Our oldest son went to Bible College in Three Hill, Alberta Canada. He fell in love with and married a young lady who he decided he couldn't live without. Our son not only fell in love with his Canadian wife but also with Canada. They remained in Canada, and Scott is currently the pastor of a church in a small town in south central British Columbia.

Over the course of a year we will visit back and forth one or two times each. In the past eight years we have spent several thanksgivings in Canada. We spend the American Thanksgiving with them as the Canadian Thanksgiving is in October.

When we travel north to Canada, we enjoy taking Hwy 97. Hwy 97 is the major north south route on the east side of the Cascades, across both Oregon and Washington and into Canada. For the most part, Hwy 97 is a two-lane highway. Unlike I-5 on the west side of the Cascades, 97, for the most part, does not run through the major cities and towns. Much of the time as you travel on Hwy 97 there are only a few towns connected by miles of open high desert-range lands and large winter wheat fields.

It was on one of our return trips from Canada after a Thanksgiving spent with our son and his family that it occurred to me. I might have a false sense of security. We were south bound in a very remote area; there was a light dusting of snow along the highway and in the fields. All the ponds were frozen and the fence wires were laden with ice formed by frozen fog that had formed during the night. Occasionally as we drove we would come to a low-lying area where fog was still laying, the fog would freeze to the windshield and would be frozen on the roadway. Other than in those low-lying areas however, the fog had burned off.

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was showing itself in the eastern sky and my wife was taking a nap. I had on my sunglasses and was very

comfortable in my tee shirt in the confines of our car with the heater keeping us warm with the desired amount of heat. We were traveling at a consistent rate and were making good time. Then it occurred to me, this could be a situation where someone could find themselves quickly in trouble because of a false sense of security.

“What If?” What if I slid off the road on an unseen patch of ice? What if, just one of those many major components at work on our vehicle failed? How quick would the interior of our vehicle become uncomfortably cold? How long would it be before help arrived and who and how could I summon someone for that help?

Remember, my wife was asleep so I was alone with my thoughts at the time. I was at that time employed at a medium size water treatment plant and thought, “WOW”, the same principal applied to us in our car as it does at the water plant. That principal is preventive maintenance and being prepared.

I have one simple basic philosophy about any and all mechanical equipment, that is: “nothing mechanical gets better with age”. Whatever is of a mechanical nature is going to need maintenance and will at some point need to be replaced.

How often does it happen? It's summer; production is up; water quality is perfect, and all the mechanical equipment is operating at peak performance. Then it happens, we slip into a false sense of security. Because everything is going so well, and with the higher production due to summer demands, the preventive maintenance program (PMP) goes to the back burner.

From our personal vehicles to water and wastewater treatment facilities, distribution systems, office equipment, construction equipment, system vehicles, to mention a few, all need a PMP. A PMP can be as simple as a 3x5 card for each piece of equipment in a card file, or as sophisticated as a computer program. Whichever you use, you will want to keep an accurate record of all maintenance performed.

Some of the basics are, information on each piece of equipment such as when it was manufactured, who is the manufacturer, when it was installed, what

size, horsepower, pump size, etc., is it single or three phase, model and serial numbers. Are parts available and if so where? Is there a factory representative in your area and if so what is the rep's phone number? What is the maintenance frequency, what kind or grade of oil is needed? Is there a recommended spare parts list, if so do you have those parts on hand? And if you do, are they in a known location? Many times you will find if you know the manufacturer, have a model and a serial number and other information located on a piece of equipment, you can go online and acquire valuable maintenance information.

We did have a good trip, the car did not slip off the road and we did not break down. However, we do carry a duffel bag with some food, a flashlight, extra warm clothes and a blanket with some other odds and ends. I always do proper maintenance to our vehicles, and do a pre-trip check before we leave on longer drives. This is not to say that preventive maintenance and good planning will always keep things from going wrong, but it will significantly reduce the frequency of major break downs.

Another good tool that can be used in a PPM is an equipment check list. A daily visual inspection, with a hard copy check off list, with a space for comments. If you are responsible for operation and maintenance or if you have maintenance personnel, this is a useful tool to log both equipment that is functioning properly or in need of some type of maintenance or service.

No matter if it is your personal equipment or equipment you are responsible for at your place of employment, remember: "Nothing mechanical gets better with age". Whatever is mechanical, that moves, is going to require maintenance and will need to be replaced at some point in time.