

CUTTING EDGE ON THE NORTHERN EDGE

Jerry Newton
Minnesota Explosives Company
in Cooperation with the Lake Superior Chapter of the SEE

BULK EXPLOSIVES - FOUR DECADES OF EVOLUTION

The bulk explosives industry is relatively young compared to how long explosives have been in use. It's been around for about forty years, about the length of a person's career. This period of explosives history has seen constant change. The type of product, the manufacture and the trucks that haul it have changed a great deal over the years.

Companies that haven't stayed on the cutting edge of technology have lost their ability to compete in the marketplace. Just think about the number of companies that have passed into history as the technology changed.

This has also meant an evolution for workers in the industry. In the sixties, when bulk deliveries came into widespread use, there was little consideration for health, safety and compliance. Safety meetings were rare and training was informal. You learned as you went from the people you worked with.

The era of safety and compliance was first ushered in during the seventies, as new government regulatory agencies were created. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Mining Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) started inspections of the workplace. For the explosives companies, the possibility of a surprise inspection from OSHA helped prompt the beginning of safety meetings, training and safeguards in the industry.

Additional rules and regulations arrived in the eighties, with the many new governmental regulations. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) started inspecting magazines and addressing the need for site security. The Department of Transportation took a stricter look at truck maintenance, blasting agent placards and most importantly, the drivers. Each of the states individual systems of class A driver's licenses was changed to a commercial driver's license that is coordinated by an interstate computer system. Mandatory drug tests came into widespread use, and MSHA looked more closely at blast procedures and bulk explosives deliveries at the minesite.

As we reached the nineties, the flow of government regulations has reached flood stage. Sometimes it feels as if the various agencies are in competition to create the most mandates. Overwhelming is probably one of the nicer words used to describe this tidal wave of new rules and regulations. But there have been benefits, we now work in a much

safer and healthier environment. Safety meetings, training sessions and improved personal protective equipment have helped to guard against injuries and long term exposure to hazardous materials. Hazard recognition and standard operating procedures are helping to create a proactive safety process.