

Understanding Maintenance Chaos Fatigue

Let face it, controlled maintenance functions like; maintenance checks, routine activities and documentation are not as fun as the alternatives of modifying machines, installing machines, attending breakdowns or the fitting and adjustment of change parts, these activates are clearly more exciting and rewarding for your maintenance people. The most exciting one of all is responding to breakdowns, this I believe is the biggest maintenance killer because it becomes like a drug for your maintenance people.

Here's why I believe this is the case; everyone wants to feel important, there is no one more important in the world, to a production manager, than a maintenance person when their production line is broken down. When the line is fixed the maintenance person is often congratulated for the great work they have done in fixing the breakdown quickly.

It is not unusual to hear General Manager's point out an individual from maintenance and continue on about how good a job they have done because they fixed a break down that could have cause major problems with plant output. This gives this maintenance person 15 seconds of fame and it feels good. This feeds the need for more breakdown success.

With more breakdowns comes less reliability and a reluctance to do preventive work as this does not give the same level of satisfaction or recognition, in fact there is often no reward for good maintenance except an easier life at work. It is normal to go to a plant and see every maintenance person just responding to breakdowns. There are two problems with this; the first problem is when you wait for a breakdown you not only have the cost of fixing it but also the cost of the plant downtime.

The second and ultimate cost of breakdown is turnover of staff due to 'Chaos Fatigue'. Continued and increasing breakdowns, as is common in the breakdown maintenance mode, will inevitably burnout your maintenance staff. This burnout is due to a number of factors, firstly having to face every day the ongoing and repeated breakdown dramas that were fun at first but quickly becomes fatiguing.

The next step is the pressure from management on the maintenance staff to fix the plant faster because the downtime becomes more visible and unavoidable which quickly leads to 'The blame game'. Ultimately this all leads to a major breakdown in relationship between maintenance, production and management. Inevitably this will lead you to having a maintenance team who are combative, bitter, defensive and unproductive. It is not long after this that your maintenance people start to leave and you get to employ a new person and by not addressing the root cause of the problem their path to burnout begins.