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Sensors and New Management

It has come to my attention that some metalforming companies have backed off from their die-protection sensor programs. To cut costs and save money, their sensor programs have received a range of haircuts with the worst being the total elimination of an inhouse sensor program. On the other hand, there are metalforming companies who are aggressively ramping up their sensor programs for the same reason—to save the company money. How is this possible? How can companies have such radically different opinions of sensor programs?

In this challenging economy there have been lots of management personnel shuffles in the upper ranks of our metalforming companies. Long accepted and established best practices with sensors for die protection are being freshly reviewed by new managerial staffs. A new vice president of finance, engineering, manufacturing or tooling who does not come from a shop fully committed to electronic sensing for mistake-proofing will perhaps not fully understand why his new employer has invested so much into a serious sensor program. Why have a fulltime sensor applications specialist? Why have a sensor lab to test sensor applications? Why use electronic sensors to monitor strip feed position, stripper-plate closure, cam returns, nitrogen-cylinder pressures, punch breakage and the like when all that is needed is to monitor the part out? In fact, why have electronic sensors at all when the experience that this new management-team member has with die protection is a simple whisker wire at the end of the die checking for short feed?

It is not hard to imagine that financially driven efforts when combined with the benevolent ignorance of how electronic sensors actually save the company

enormous amounts of money can lead to sensor-program haircuts. I say benevolent ignorance because I suspect that this new crop of management has not had the exposure and development with respect to mistake-proof manufacturing that the previous managerial ranks have had.

New managers may come from stamping shops that had no formal sensor program and thus die crashes were viewed as a normal part of doing business. Or, they may be from an unrelated industry where electronic sensing would have been an exotic venture. Or, they may be from outside manufacturing altogether. Whatever their backgrounds, it is paramount that managers receive a clear explanation of how the sensor program has saved their new employer die-repair and scrap expenses.

Once a successful sensor-based mistake-proofing program is in place and saving money, everyone from the press operator to the owner no longer questions the need for sensors. Cost justifications for the first few dozen dies were mandatory at a shop years ago when a program was first started. Years later there is no need to perform detailed financial reports as it becomes clear that sensors work.

I ask that before we throw the baby out with the bath water that we have a serious conversation as to why we had the baby in the first place. Those who gave birth to a sensor program and nourished it for years need to appreciate the new manager's lack of appreciation for such a program. I believe that a thorough presentation, with images and cost analyses, be made to all new managers. Give the new manager the benefit of the doubt and you may be surprised how quickly he will come onboard and support your sensor program. **MF**