

Stevenson, The Color Company, Invokes Disaster Plan

Most disaster scenarios deal with fire, flood, storm or power outage, but few deal with what to do when you are locked out of your facility.

BY DENNIS MASON

Printers and trade service organizations have been told time and again the value of a written, workable disaster plan. Two recent and widely publicized printing industry events—the July 2002 Quad/Graphics warehouse collapse in Lomira, Wisconsin, and the September 2004 tornado that hit United Litho in Ashburn, Virginia—brought home again the wisdom of such planning. Still, far too few have taken concrete action and put a disaster plan in place.

Stevenson, The Color Company, in Cincinnati, Ohio, had the opportunity recently to test the viability of their disaster plan in a totally unforeseen manner. Most disaster scenarios detail what to do in case of chemical spill, fire, flood, storm, or power outage, but few deal with what to do when you are locked out of your facility. The following timeline shows what the company endured.

Sunday, August 28, 2005

At 6:30 p.m., Cincinnati police receive 911 calls about a smoking railroad tank car in an area of Cincinnati known as the East End, an industrial/residential area where Stevenson, The Color Company, is located. The rail car is determined to contain styrene, a chemical used extensively in the production of plastics, rubber and resins. Styrene is classified as a possible human carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency and by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Short term exposure causes headaches, nausea and dizziness. Firefighters declare the leaking tank car under control, but another large

plume of gas is released after midnight. Third shift workers at Stevenson, The Color Company, are denied access to the plant by authorities.

Monday, August 29, 2005

In the early morning hours, emergency management personnel are called out and ordered to report to the scene. Another major venting occurs about 6:30 a.m., sending a plume of chemicals 400 feet into the air. By 9 a.m., a command center is opened by authorities. Police and fire officials order a half-mile radius area around the tank car evacuated, and then quickly extend the evacuation zone to a one-mile radius. The Red Cross sets up a shelter nearby; air monitors track the chemical plume; firefighters douse the rail car with water throughout the day. Officials at Houston-based Westlake Chemical Corporation—owner of the rail car—send an eight-member emergency response team to the scene.

Stevenson, The Color Company, is closed, with all employees forbidden by authorities to enter the plant. Management has difficulty getting information. Says Thomas J. Stevenson, vice-president of the company, “From the start, it was extremely difficult to get any facts about the emergency. We found ourselves dealing with multiple overlapping jurisdictions—city, county, state, federal, fire department, and police. And while well-intentioned, officials charged with briefing the public were often reluctant to take a position. Media reports all too often were based on rumor rather than fact. Infor-



A chemical spill and a three-day plant closure didn't stop Stevenson, The Color Company, from making sure everything was ready for GretagMacbeth's presentation package for Print 05. The situation allowed the company to put into practice GretagMacbeth's new Generic Output Profile technology.

mation about when we might return to the plant, when available at all, was often conflicting.”

Tuesday, August 30, 2005

Firefighters continue to pump water onto the rail car, cooling the styrene inside to about 230°F. The leak slows and air contamination declines around the car. Officials discuss lifting the evacuation order, but decide the car still may pose a threat. Three lawsuits are filed in the Hamilton County Common Pleas Court.

By accessing prepress and production data routinely stored offsite, arrangements are made by Stevenson, The Color Company, for printing key jobs at presses of other printers in the Cincinnati area. Plans for resuming prepress work offsite take shape, in the event the evacuation continues. Solid information remains difficult to get, and rumors abound.

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

The evacuation order is lifted. Residents begin returning to their homes and employees in local factories go back to work. Firemen continue pouring water on the car. The Cincinnati mayor reports that more than \$1 million has been spent responding to the leak, which forced the evacuation of 814 properties. Cincinnati Mayor Charlie Luken is heard to comment regarding the Federal Railroad Administration

investigation: “Wal-Mart can track a pair of socks across the country, and you guys can't track a rail car full of dangerous chemicals?”

Stevenson, The Color Company, resumes operations.

Thursday, September 1, 2005

Finger pointing by authorities and politicians begins in earnest. Plans are put in place to cap the tank car and move it, but the dates for doing so remain uncertain. One account indicates that the car has been sitting on the siding for eight months, while another indicates it has been there for six months. Still another report indicates that the car was on the siding for only a few days. The tank car left Lake Charles, Louisiana, on December 31, 2004, bound for Queen City Terminals, an East End chemical depot. Apparently, a data keying error caused the car, which ordinarily would have been tracked through the rail system, to go missing in the system. Its presence became known only when the styrene became unstable after another chemical, in the mix to stabilize the styrene, lost its effectiveness after a few months.

Print production at Stevenson, The Color Company, finally is back at full strength. Although nearly three days were lost, the operation quickly returns to normal. Customers are very understanding and sympathetic.

Friday, September 2, 2005


The tank car is hauled away, bound for Lake Charles, Louisiana, where it began its journey. Except for the post mortems, the emergency is over.

Looking back on the situation, Tom Stevenson says that his disaster plan served Stevenson, The Color Company, and his employees well. They had contingency plans in place, despite the fact that the precise nature of the emergency could not have been anticipated. "Aside from the fact that we could not get hard information about the status of things, everything went according to plan. No business should be without a workable disaster plan—especially in the troubled times in which we live."

Disaster Led to Use of New Technology

Another company caught off guard by the leaking tank car was GretagMacbeth, which was relying on Stevenson, The Color Company, to print and die cut special boxes in which to distribute Swiss chocolate to

customers at Print 05. Losing three days out of a busy print production schedule was not something that Karla Meeker, GretagMacbeth U.S. field marketing manager, had counted on. "This unique situation with Stevenson, The Color Company, allowed us to put into practice our new GOP (Generic Output Profile) technology," commented Meeker.

"Our box job included several custom colors and traditionally Stevenson, The Color Company, would have had to fingerprint their press to ensure accurate color output. But by using the GOP technology—part of our ProfileMaker Packaging software—they were able to take an existing ICC profile, substitute the custom colors, and create a new ICC profile including these colors. The effect on press was exactly what we wanted and the printer didn't have to go through the complete process of profiling a press. A chemical spill and a three-day plant closure didn't stop Stevenson, The Color Company, from making sure everything was ready for us when the show opened!" 



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