Resist Being Penny Wise or Dollar Foolish

By: **Rolly Clendening,** *Contributor*

Making plans for your new or expanded warehouse or production facility is a lengthy and expensive project. Decisions need to be made for every fixture and accessory to make your project practical and efficient. Planning the new home for your operation is a natural function for an architect, addressing the size and utility needs for your building.

Decisions get more difficult when it comes to machinery, fixtures, racking for storage and facility support areas. Questions arise on how budgets are to be used to get both values in saving money, while investing where quality objects will benefit the operation best.

Over the last 18 months I have been contacted to travel the country, helping address a safety issue that was never included into the building plans for a national retail company's distribution centers. Some of the facilities were older and some were fairly new, but intersection safety was one of the unaddressed concerns in the planning process. Forklift and pedestrian safety were left to the forklift operators that sounded their horns when approaching blind spots at the end of aisles.

Fortunately, these distribution centers avoided traffic-related injuries for years. But like most good things, the luck ran out and an employee lost a limb when pinned between two moving vehicles at an intersection at the end of an aisle.

The national safety director for this company recalled seeing various safety options for intersections and other blind spots at national trade shows like MODEX, ASSP and NSC Conferences. Their first call was to ask our company to develop an intersections/blind spot protection program for their facilities. I traveled the U.S. performing full site mirror surveys to protect each intersection and problem blind spots in multiple regional distribution centers. They have also installed "blue light" forklift lights and signage to project a distanced warning that these vehicles are approaching.

What does this have to do with project planning?

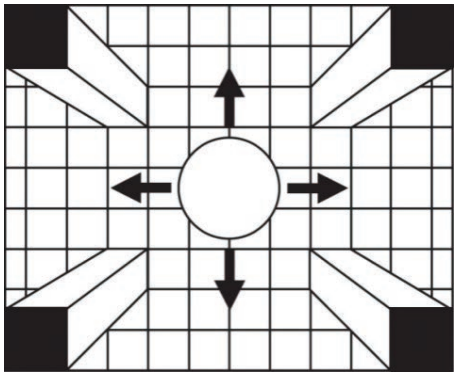
The cost for the single accident expense that started the *reactive* project was probably more than the cost for all the mirrors in the solution project itself. Workman compensation claims, increased insurance premiums and possible OSHA fines are not usually considered in an initial building budget.

Proactive planning will help protect your products, machinery and most importantly the staff that makes your company a success. Step one in your traffic and pedestrian safety program needs to happen first, then a prioritized plan that can grow into a healthy safety culture for your team. Implementing your complete plan should be a big cost savings, having installers and the needed equipment in for one visit would be beneficial.

In my 20 years of site safety surveys, I would estimate that close to 75 % of the facilities I have visited had little to no mirrors, blue light or projection warning devices at intersections. Self-preservation instincts of the staff, along with management vehicle safety policies can keep the majority fairly safe. The expensive reality is that one major incident will send everyone searching for solutions that could have been avoided with a more complete safety plan.

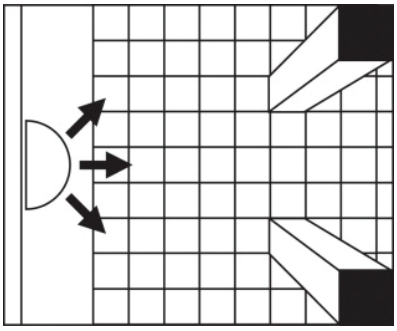
What are some of the most practical choices?

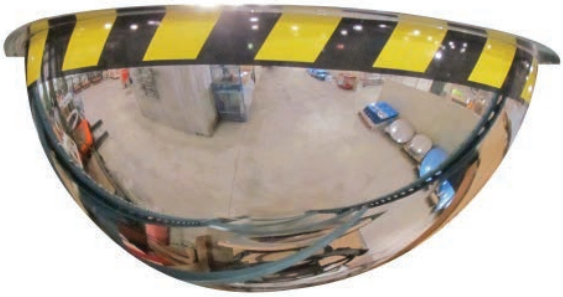
It is the responsibility of the facility manager & safety director to ensure the safety of the operation and to seek knowledgeable assistance from facility safety professionals. Management doesn't need to know everything, just a source to provide the widest assortment of solutions. If your safety distributor doesn't offer solutions, ask them to find the best answers. Selling primary PPE keeps the distributor busy, but most of them offer mirrors and other warning systems from manufacturers that can provide assistance.



Images courtesy of
Se-Kure Domes and Mirrors

Images courtesy of Se-Kure Domes and Mirrors





Here are a few basic guidelines for mirrors:

- Domes and convex mirrors use a common estimate of one inch of mirror diameter will provide one foot of viewing distance. (36" = 36' view)
- Mirrored domes at four-way intersections should be hung with the bottom of the mirror 1-2 feet above the highest moving forklift or load. Consider the height of the mounted dome to be included when evaluating viewing distances.
- Three-way intersections commonly use half domes or dome mirrors mounted at eye-level, flat against the wall at the end of an aisle.

One of the best sources for hazardous areas in your building is your own forklift operators and the pedestrians that walk the aisles on a regular basis. Taking the first step toward your safety plan will build confidence with your operations staff and will be identified by your insurance provider and OSHA visitors.

Trying to save on prevention early can cost you in the future. ***WMHS***

Rolly Clendening is a Product Engineer and Sales Manager for Se-Kure Domes and Mirrors, a Made in America Company based in Sturgis, Michigan (www.domesandmirrors.com).