



Defining Success

Most of you know that I spend a fair amount of time on the highways and back roads of Minnesota. All that windshield time needs to be filled with something other than talk radio, and one of the questions that gets a fair amount of thought is "How can a gas utility evaluate whether they are successful or not?"

I've come up with a number of potential answers to this question. One of the first things that popped into my mind concerned MNOPS inspection results. It's probably fair to say that every pipeline operator wants to get a clean "report card" from their inspector, whether it is a Field and Records Inspection or a Headquarters/O&M inspection. All of you put a lot of work into completing compliance tasks in a timely manner, correcting problems that are found on the system, and preparing for inspections. It's great when that work is recognized during inspections.

Another possible answer that was drilled into my head early in my career concerns meter sets. A common refrain has been "the only part of our systems that the customer sees is the above ground portion, so let's keep it looking good". Does regular repainting and monitoring of meter sets make us successful?

Customers also deserve timely, accurate bills and competitive rates. Eliminating billing errors and providing the best rates in the state would seem to be a sure fire way to measure success. And let's not forget about continuity of service-we surely can't be having service interruptions and still consider ourselves successful.

But ultimately, while all of the above items are important, getting those right 100% of the time still doesn't guarantee success. Success is defined as "the achievement of what is planned or intended". There is one other goal that we must meet in order to "achieve what we intended", and that is safety. If our distribution systems are not operated safely-that is, if customers, employees, or the general public are injured or killed- we can't be considered successful, regardless of what is accomplished in any of the areas listed above.

Every one of us makes decisions each day that affect safety. Keep in mind that safety is not just a buzzword or a program, it's also a vital component of operating a successful gas distribution utility and consider that when making your daily decisions. Wear required PPE, follow procedures, and use the proper equipment for the job. It's essential to success!

Code Corner

With the end of the year approaching, there are a couple of items to review this month. I've mentioned both of them before but want to give you a reminder about actions that might have to be taken before year end.

First, your public awareness plan (192.616) requires that you communicate with your customers twice each year in accordance with the matrix in Section 4 of your plan. The required Baseline Messages are listed, along with the Suggested Delivery Method. Remember-not all baseline messages have to be delivered at the same time. You can include one each month and get everything covered twice in a year. This sounds more confusing than it actually is, so call me if you have questions.

Second, make sure you have a good handle on your leak records. Annual Reports (191.11) are being reviewed more closely all the time, and you should be able to show where the numbers you report to PHMSA come from. Remember, a leak that needs to be reported on the Annual Report is defined as "**an unintentional escape of gas from the pipeline. A non-hazardous release that can be eliminated by lubrication, adjustment, or tightening is not a leak**". When an inspector looks at your annual report they very likely will want to see the documentation of the leaks you reported and will compare them to the above definition.

OQ 2010

I'm currently working on updating everyone's OQ spreadsheet to reflect what modules will need to be completed in 2010. I plan on sending them out sometime this month for most towns. When you receive them, you will be registered for the EnergyU modules that need to be completed. Anyone logging into that system should only see those modules that need to be done in 2010. For those locations that prefer to do these modules in a classroom setting I will be contacting about dates, or you can call me to set up a preferred date for your location.

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