

Blame habituation, not workers, for safety incidents

BY JOHN MINER, *Ontario Farmer*

Stratford - Running supplies and personnel to forward operating bases in Afghanistan made it crucial to pay attention to detail.

A change in a stone pile or a new hump in the road could be a sign an improvised explosive device had been planted by the Taliban.

Despite the high degree of risk, Scott Halling said his crew had to contend with the phenomena of habituation.

Habituation is also the reason that safety training programs and disciplining workers for safety violations often fail to improve results, said Halling, a safety performance consultant and president of Daedalus Safety Group.

Halling, who conducts safety audits for companies, told the Canadian Farm Builders Association conference that habituation is an automatic filtering mechanism of the brain and happens below the conscious level.

It is akin to sweating. You don't think about it, but when you are hot, you sweat, he said.

When faced with the same task or routine, the brain filters out familiar patterns.

"We are wired for efficiency. If I do the same task every day and there is nothing to learn from it, then my brain diverts attention to something else like how many steaks do I need to buy for my cookout on Sunday?"

When something becomes familiar, the brain stops paying attention.

A result is the perception of risk drops even when a hazard hasn't changed, Halling said.

"People feel confident right up to the moment things go wrong."

To counter habituation in Afghanistan, Halling said his crew would rotate drivers every day and take a different route if it was

possible.

"We didn't want to die, we didn't want to take short cuts."

Construction is a perfect storm for habituation with its repetitive layouts, long stretches of identical tasks and the same crews for months, he said.

Workers stop noticing hazards.

When something goes wrong, it isn't because the employees are bad workers. It is the predictable outcome of habituation.

To counter habituation, Halling recommended rotating tasks and changing the work environment.

Drop off areas for supplies might be changed. Conduct randomized inspections. Find ways to interrupt patterns.

"Breaking things up helps prevent that monotony and repetition that leads to habituation."

Halling called for a rethinking of safety incident investigations.

As an auditor reviewing company investigations, he found incident investigations are very good at finding out what someone did wrong and what they should have done, but they never sufficiently address why.

Instead at looking at the workplace conditions, the investigations start from the assumption that someone wasn't paying attention.

"It repeats the same findings, which produce corrective actions, without improving outcomes. It leads to frustration for supervisors and workers."

The hard truth is that habituation isn't a worker problem, it is a system problem, Halling said.



Scott Halling: "People feel confident right up to the moment things go wrong"

Prices drop for vegetable growers

BY JEFFREY CARTER, *Ontario Farmer*

Shifting patterns of global trade are having an impact on Ontario's processing vegetable growers, with a recent surge in low-priced imports to Canada. In response, the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers (OPVG) have joined forces with growers in other provinces and Canadian processors to seek federal government involvement to support their industry.

Dave Hope, chair of the OPVG, spoke about the development following the annual meeting of the organization on March 30 and also touched on price reductions for growers for the 2026 crop. "There were small decreases on many of the crops so that was not (a positive). Growers would have been happier if it was flat," Hope said.

Concerning any potential shift in acreages of the various processing crops that fall under the OPVG's mandate, Hope said the companies had not yet determined the numbers. He noted that the acreage of California processing tomatoes is expected to fall this year.

An organization formed earlier this year, the Canadian Association of Vegetable Growers and Processors, is working with federal government to address concerns over the rise in low-cost imports. The group released a statement on March 13 in response to the federal decision to launch a 'safeguard inquiry' into imports of canned and frozen vegetables by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal (CITT).

A public hearing is to commence in June and a report issued in September.

According to a release from the Department of Finance Canada, "The tribunal will have 180 days to determine if increase imports of these products are causing, or threatening to cause, serious injury to Canadian vegetable growers and processors, and to make recommendations to government on appropriate remedies."

According to the CITT website, "International trade rules allow Canada to temporarily restrict imports to allow Canadian producers to adapt. These temporary measures are called safeguards."

Hope said it is important to Canada's food security to ensure its processing vegetable industry is successful. "We think it's important we have a healthy sector and that Canadians have a choice to have those local Canadian products."

Hope did not want to delve into the details but said the entire world is dealing with the fallout from tariff actions.

During their annual meeting, growers approved several resolutions. These included a resolution to investigate the long-term sustainability of the processing vegetable industry in the light of rising inputs costs, lower grower returns, and the potential of alternative crops.

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