Back In Time

‘Those who ignore history are bound to repeat it.’

A look back at this month 20 years ago in EM Magazine: April 1999.

Twenty years ago, the impending new millennium—Y2K—was making headline news across the globe. The April 1999 issue of EM focused on one particular aspect: The Y2K bug. While there had been much discussion of how Y2K problems may affect banking, utilities, defense systems, and manufacturing, relatively little had focused on environmental protection systems and public safety. In the cover story article of the April issue, EM shone light on the topic with a look at the potential environmental implications of the Y2K bug.

In the article, The Y2K Bug: Environmental Management Challenges and Legal Implications, Dixie Lee Laswell considered the potential environmental and legal consequences of the Y2K bug, the federal government’s response to it, and steps companies could take to combat its effects. The overarching fear was that many operations designed to protect human health and the environment might have Y2K date problems that could trigger safety-related system malfunctions, toxic releases, and contamination.

Quoting from the article: “Although the Y2K bug sounds more like the star of a science fiction movie, this bug is real. Officials in the private sector and in government readily acknowledge its existence, although no one knows exactly what to expect from it. If there is one thing upon which everyone agrees, it is that the January 1, 2000, deadline cannot be renegotiated. Hence, it is essential for companies to conduct both technical and legal Y2K assessments as soon as possible to avoid huge liabilities and headaches in the next century. Awareness, prevention, and contingency planning now will help minimize the risk of environmental disaster at the stroke of midnight, Friday, December 31, 1999.”

In another article, Strategic Framework for Risk Management and Planning in Industrial Settings, by Wilhelm Kross and Martin Whittaker, the authors explored the means by which strategic management considerations may be integrated into the risk assessment process, and presented ideas on how integrated risk analyses could be used as value-added management tools.

Quoting from the article: “The consequences of a good decision are often forgotten, but the consequences of poor decisions for industrial operations (from planning to development, operation, decommissioning, and closure) are likely to make headline news and be managed when a crisis occurs. Worse still, poor decisions or weak management systems are often not reviewed once the plan is implemented, as planners and managers tend to focus more readily on identifying solutions to apparent problems rather than analyzing deep-rooted historic mistakes.”

Elsewhere in this issue, Dan Bemi reflected on how permanent total enclosure (PTE) had gained acceptance as a cost-effective means of complying with volatile organic compound (VOC) control regulations, despite a number of PTE design challenges, in Permanent Total Enclosures Used to Capture VOCs in Process Air Streams.

Quoting from the article: “Another popular misconception concerning PTE use is that the operator environment is compromised because of the concentration of contaminants in the reduced work area. This may be true in a poorly designed PTE; however, with appropriate room-air changes, a well-designed ventilation pattern, and, in some cases, the addition of a closed-loop air conditioning system, the air quality within the enclosure is often far better than pre-PTE conditions.”

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