

A small word with a lot of Power – ASK!!

February 2020

“I *think* this is the right valve – maybe I should ask the senior operator. No, he’s busy, I’m *pretty sure* it’s right.”

“I am *pretty sure* this calculation is right, but if I ask, I’ll look stupid. I’ll just go with it.”

“The ID number on this instrument is hard to read. It *surely* is the right one; I’ll take it off-line for calibration. The panel operator will tell me if it’s wrong.”



How Does One Decide?

What’s the difference between what we “*think*” and what we “*know*?” – A LOT!! What we do is based on our experience (good or bad), and what we remember to be correct. That means there is a reasonable chance our actions could be wrong. Knowing means acting on what has been determined to be correct based on accurate information and procedures. And proper thinking, not guessing or assuming. It is better to delay the operation and confirm what is correct rather than proceeding and having an upset, spill, or worse.

CSB (Report No. 2016-02-I-LA, and a [video](#)) analyzes a fire following the release of isobutane during the attempted repair of a valve; the operators did not know the specific procedure for that valve and did not consider the possible hazards. The operators did not “*know*”.

Did you know?

- Chemical operations require a high degree of operational discipline – doing the *right* thing the *right* way *every time*.
- Industry has moved to computerized basic control systems; but this makes it even more important that people *know* what they are doing is correct.
- No matter what job you perform, doing it correctly is important. Some errors are more detectable than others. If an error is less obvious or has no immediate consequences, it may go a while before it is discovered either by observation or by process deviation.

What can you do?

- If you do not know, if you doubt, **just** ask! *Looking stupid is less of a fault than causing an accident. Your question may produce benefits to others by review of training or reassessment of the problem you asked about.*
- Keep yourself informed about all procedures touching your job and follow them. If you see contradictions, remember the first point above
- Respect the advice of those who point out where you may be wrong – it is help, not an insult. And when you see others about to make a mistake, ask them if they are sure they are doing it right.

The only “SILLY” question is the one that has not been asked