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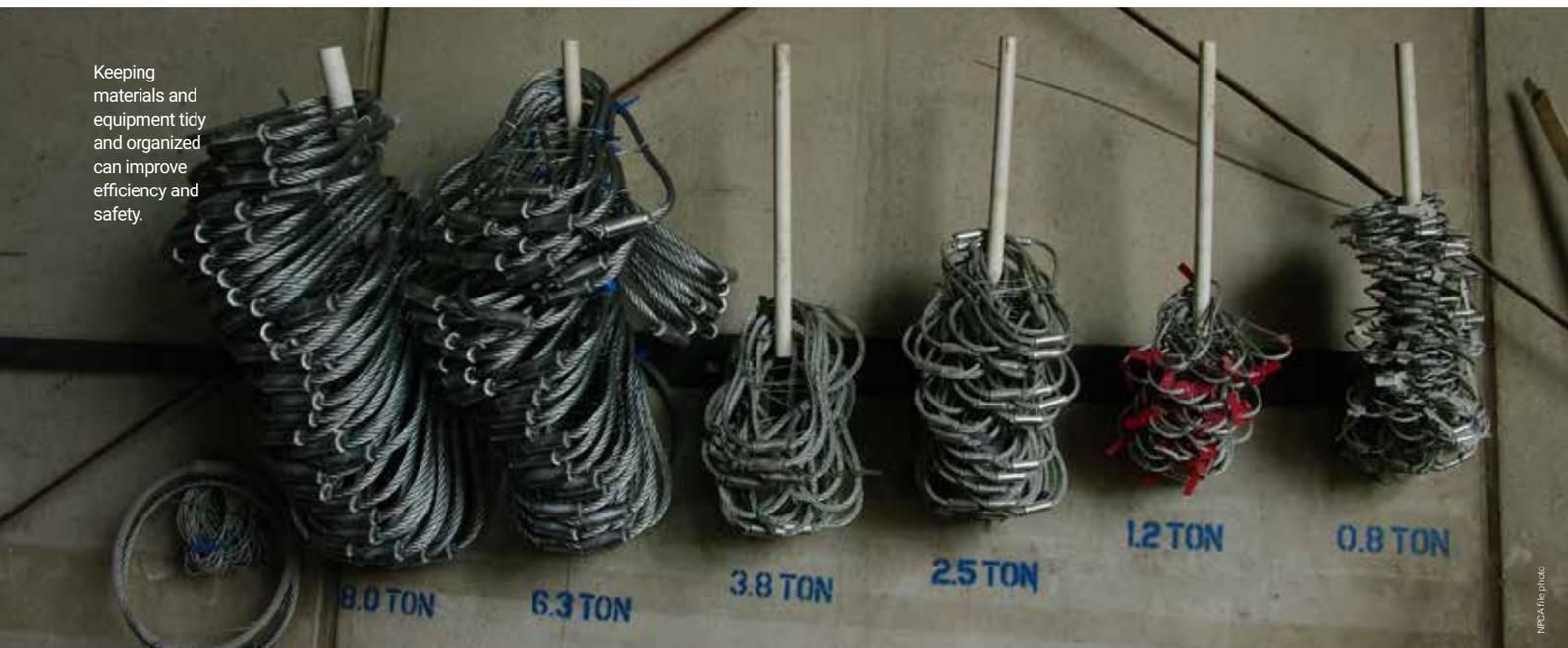
# Getting Your Precast Plant

# IN ORDER

By Bridget McCrea

**Precasters can improve plant safety and efficiency by implementing housekeeping, cleaning and organizing initiatives.**

Keeping materials and equipment tidy and organized can improve efficiency and safety.



**F**or Operations Manager Jude Mandes, keeping Gillespie Precast's three plants clean, organized and operating at their fullest potential is a daily battle, but one that's well worth the time and effort that he and his team put into it.

Whether that means arranging tools to ensure good accessibility when employees need them, keeping floors clear of debris and waste or cleaning plant equipment regularly to make sure it remains operational, the overall act of plant/shop housekeeping is an important exercise that Gillespie takes seriously.

"We use a clean-as-you-go policy, which we try to enforce every day, all day," said Mandes.

Introduced as part of the precaster's new employee orientation, housekeeping is positioned as a fundamental safety practice.

"We really try to be practical with it and get all our workers on board with the idea that good housekeeping helps to create a safe, organized productive workplace," Mandes said.

Mandes, who has been a Gillespie employee for 16 years, said the company has been focused on creating a safe, clean workplace for its employees since day one. It has also honed its approach over time and taken it a few steps further over the years. Every time it introduces a new concept or process, the precaster realizes that there will be some cultural changes.

Veteran employees who have always just dropped their stuff and moved along, for example, are reluctant to conform to new ways of organizing tools and equipment. Younger employees, on the other hand, expect others to clean up after them, said Mandes.

“We basically have to beat the bush from the top-down and monitor it all day,” he said.

## CREATING A CLEAN, SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

An organized manufacturing plant shows that you and your employees value your organization, safety, your customers and your business partners. It also makes for a very welcoming atmosphere and shows that everyone at your company takes great pride in the facility. Perhaps most importantly, cleanliness also translates into a safer workplace since clean, dry factory floors help prevent accidents. Finally, having a clean, organized plant can also be a great sales and marketing tool when current or prospective customers drop in for a visit.

For many companies, simple directives like putting tools back in their proper places can fall by the wayside when business picks up and workdays get busy. Unfortunately, when a plant employee can't find the right tool for a specific task – or when someone slips and falls on a spill that was ignored and never cleaned up – it can definitely take a toll on a plant's productivity. Luckily, this vicious cycle can be avoided with good, ongoing plant cleaning, housekeeping and organizational policies.

After initially outfitting all of its plants with a plethora of brooms and sweepers that employees could use to sweep their messes into piles, Gillespie tried something else. It equipped those locations with multiple wheelbarrows to encourage the continuous collection and disposal of waste.

“We want wheelbarrows all over our plant so that when our employees strip forms, cut wire and make plugs, they can drop the trash and concrete right into the wheelbarrows,” Mandes said.

Workers also use the handy receptacles to quickly scoop up any debris piles on the floor – eventually wheeling all of it to the center of the building for disposal.

“That's one strategy that's really worked well for us,” Mandes said. “The key is to have an abundance of wheelbarrows scattered around the plant because it really encourages everyone to clean continuously.”

## SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE

Maintaining a clean, safe plant doesn't have to be a challenge, nor does it have to be expensive or time consuming. It does, however, require a commitment from managers, supervisors and employees to keep the workplace in good working order on a 24/7/365 basis – not just for annual inspections or quarterly checkups.

Sam Lines worked at a precast plant for 15 years before joining Concrete Sealants 13 years ago as an engineering manager. Lines said the fact that it's difficult to keep a shop clean in the precasting environment makes plant cleanliness particularly difficult for companies to achieve.

“Concrete products by their very nature produce a lot of dirt and dust,” Lines said.

For these reasons, Lines said precast owners, managers and

supervisors should shift their thinking to setting good examples for employees, as opposed to just dictating rules and policies down the chain of command. By leveraging the “do as I do” management approach, they can effectively infuse good housekeeping strategies into the workplace without ruffling too many feathers.

“If you're leading an organization and you're not practicing good organization and housekeeping, and if you're not cleaning your office and keeping your environment clean, then how can you expect others to participate in keeping their areas clean?” Lines said.

Along with setting a good example in these areas, Lines said leaders also have to establish a vision for what they want that clearly illustrates exactly what's expected of workers when it comes to plant and workspace housekeeping, cleaning and organization.

“Set the example and be the example,” Lines said. “Then, create that mental image of what perfect looks like and convey it to employees.”

One way to achieve the latter is by taking pictures of those perfect scenarios and hanging those pictures in strategic locations throughout the shop. Organize the nearest workbench or tool board exactly how you'd like it to look every day, take a picture of it and post it right next to that workbench or tool board.

“Doing this gives the workers an opportunity to see what perfect looks like,” Lines said. “This

is important because without expectations, it's difficult for anyone to understand what is expected of them in terms of cleaning, organization and housekeeping.”

## THE BEDROCK OF A GREAT OPERATION

Tatsuya Nakagawa, co-founder of sustainable floor coating firm Castagra, said when developing a housekeeping action plan, precast concrete manufacturers should start by focusing on keeping facilities tidy and organized. Do it in the name of safety first and understand other benefits (efficiencies, employee satisfaction, etc.) will come naturally once the wheels are set in motion.

“All companies right now are running very lean and trying to eke as much as they can out of their operations,” Nakagawa said. “Any level of disorganization is going to negatively impact their bottom lines and/or safety records.”

Having an organized plant also allows precasters to start optimizing their operations.

“If the individual pieces aren't organized, then manufacturers can't really leverage optimization because they're spending too much time trying to figure out where everything is and where everything's going,” Nakagawa said. “For this and other reasons, being organized is the bedrock of a great operation.”

Greg Stratis, president of Shea Concrete Products, concurs and said his company prides itself in always maintaining a neat and orderly operation – from its delivery vehicles to its offices to its production plant.

“We look at all of it as a billboard for our company,” Stratis said. “We want to make sure that when customers, employees and even competitors see our facilities, that they don't see precast as a messy, dirty, oily job.”

Focused on maintaining a polished image, Shea Concrete emphasizes the need for a clean and orderly workspace right when employees

“GOOD HOUSEKEEPING  
HELPS TO CREATE A  
SAFE, ORGANIZED  
PRODUCTIVE  
WORKPLACE.”

– Jude Mandes, *Gillespie Precast*

are hired, and then continues to train them on the merits of this philosophy over time. And because cleanliness often equates to better safety records in the heavy manufacturing industry, the company gets the highest payout in the form of a safe, secure workplace. Employee morale is also better, said Stratis, when the workplace itself is neat, clean and organized.

“We want to be able to bring someone by – be it a customer or a prospective employee – without having to run around and clean up every time,” Stratis said. “We’re always ready for company.”

**“BEING ORGANIZED IS  
THE BEDROCK OF A  
GREAT OPERATION.”**  
 – Tatsuya Nakagawa, *Castagra*

**LONG-TERM SUCCESS**

Tom Richert, principal at LeanProject, has worked with many industrial companies that needed help developing effective housekeeping and organizational strategies for their plants and factories. A lean manufacturing expert, Richert said developing continuous improvement processes for cleanliness not only creates operational efficiencies, but it also makes for a more pleasant work environment. The latter is particularly important at times when companies are grappling with a skilled worker shortage and a historically low unemployment rate of 3.7%, as of September 2018, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For manufacturers, Richert said good plant organization starts at the production process itself, which in many cases is handled in a “seat of the pants” fashion and, as such, has a lot of waste built into it.

“If you take the time to map out how work would ideally be done, and then look at how it’s being done now, you’ll probably detect some pretty big differences between the two,” Richert said. “Only then can you start taking some of the unnecessary steps – many of which contribute to factory messiness – out of the process.”

Another good step is to keep inventories to a minimum out on the shop floor. In fact, workers should only have exactly what they need to do their jobs. In return, Richert said precasters can expect benefits like improved worker productivity, better employee engagement, fewer safety incidences and better overall plant efficiencies.

“The companies that focus on creating a culture where people want to participate in making the work better – and that includes cleanliness and organization – are always the ones that are most vibrant and successful over the long term,” Richert said. ■

*Bridget McCrea is a freelance writer who covers manufacturing, industry and technology. She is a winner of the Florida Magazine Association’s Gold Award for best trade-technical feature statewide.*

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