

Univertical Sets the Industry Standard for Safety

“I am extremely proud of our people and the achievement of changing the paradigm of what we can do. Our staff accepted the challenge that we wanted to improve our safety and they have exceeded our imaginations. Now we are asking how good can we get. Our biggest potential threat is complacency. We have developed and improved processes over the years and I believe we are unique in that we design and build many of our process equipment and controls. We make extensive use of automation and automated monitoring equipment. We have a very talented group of people who collaborate and take an active interest in our quality and safety.”

W. Chuck Walker, President.

Univertical Corporation, a high-purity chemicals and anode manufacturer currently located in Angola, IN, has been serving the global plating industry since they opened their doors in 1938. Founder Charles T. Walker began the business in Detroit, MI. The company relocated to Angola in 1996, combining both the anode and chemical manufacturing units into one facility. Current company CEO and NASF member Wayne “Chuck” Walker has run the company since his father’s retirement in 2002.

Safety in an anode and chemical manufacturing facility has always been a challenge. Here at Univertical, we have molten metal at 2250° Fahrenheit 24/7, 69,000 volt electric service, bulk storage of acids, bulk storage of gases, copper and nickel sulfamates, acetates, bromides and cyanides. Daily, we are manufacturing metals and chemicals for the plating industry. Univertical has always stressed safety and there is and always has been a corporate policy in regards to safety. The challenge of relocating a manufacturing facility from one state to another while maintaining full production presented many unique challenges for the staff at Univertical.

Univertical has always been a small, family owned business, currently staffing about 65 employees in Angola, IN and 60 employees at their sister facility Univertical International in Suzhou, China. The relocation of their headquarters from Detroit to Angola was accomplished with many of the current staff. This staff not only was directly involved in the removal and reassembly of the equipment in Angola; it also had to maintain operations in two different locations in Detroit to meet customer orders. Again, this presented many challenges.

Current Safety Coordinator Rob Green, Mechanical Engineer, has overseen the safety programs at Univertical since 1994. The backbone of the company’s safety program is an integrated Safety Committee which coordinates and oversees the Univertical safety initiative. The demands of the relocation and production pushed all employees’ limits but the structure of the company’s program made the transition possible.

The relocation of the facility from Michigan to Indiana required working directly with INOSHA in meeting all of the safety requirements for the facility. Using the state’s INSafe Safety Division (formerly BUSET), Univertical has achieved many safety recognitions. INSafe inspectors assisted with the compliance issues to maintain complete compliance with OSHA regulations. In using INSafe for compliance assistance,

Univertical learned that the INSafe inspectors were also a very valuable asset for many other items.

Univertical has used INSafe for many practical safety issues, from plant-wide inspections to individual equipment inspections and training to conservation and air monitoring testing to maintain a Safe workplace for its employees.

Univertical has focused safety not only in the facility, but in the community in which it is located. Working in cooperation with suppliers, Univertical has provided training with all First Responders in the county, hospital officials, police and fire officials, as well as all employees. Mock disaster drills have been performed twice at the facility, one a table-top discussion with over 25 county officials and a full blown disaster drill in 2006. The company also maintains a presence with the local Emergency Planning Board. Univertical also has provided guided tours of its facility to all local police and fire officials to keep them informed in all safety practices needed to keep the community in tuned with the safety practices of the company.

Univertical's Safety Committee has been in full operation at the Angola facility since 1997. The Safety Committee is comprised of volunteer employees from all areas of the facility, from managers to supervisors to production workers to administrative staff. The company has rotated members from the committee to maintain a fresh, active committee. The Safety Committee currently meets on a weekly basis, addressing all issues of safety, from compliance to accident investigation.

Working with the company's insurance carrier, Univertical made a major push in 2002 to bring safety awareness to the forefront of all employees. A Safety Lunch program was instituted with the insurance company's assistance. This Safety Lunch is a free lunch provided to all workers when the facility achieves a 30-day time period with no lost-time accidents. Since the inception in late 2002, the company has provided 90 lunches for the employees, where all production ceases and the entire facility, including administration, shuts down and enjoys a free lunch.

At the present time, Univertical's current company record is 1,279 days with no lost-time accidents which was set in late 2008. The previous record, 440 days, was achieved in early 2005. After a facility incident in early 2005 in which an employee was injured, the company focus on safety was fully reviewed and readdressed. Since the accident in 2005, the company has recorded one lost-time accident. In this period of time, there have been accidents and incidents, but through the diligent work of the company employees, only one of these incidents has resulted in lost time. Strong work by the Safety Committee to make certain that all safety policies are current, all training is adequate and up-to-date, all equipment guarding issues are corrected immediately, a comprehensive Personal Protective Equipment program is in place and all employees are fully involved in the corporate policy of "Safety First" have helped to achieve this current record. Our Safety Motto is "take ten seconds and think about what you are going to do before you do it."