

## “Can we afford to buy it?”

By Dan Tousley

I’m sure it would not come as a big ‘*news flash*’ from this circuit rider from Rural Water if I were to tell you that operating budgets are tight, funding is very limited, and prices are rising as we speak. Well, ok, as you read.

Ask any financial administrator of a water system (or any other business for that matter) and they will tell you their job becomes more difficult daily as they balance priorities and assess needs, if not wants, with limited capital. Talk about magicians!

I’m learning some interesting things about front line supervisors and managers also. In spite of what I am led to believe, most, but sadly, not all, of them actually do have ‘warm’ hearts, blood actually does course through their veins, and even if they try to obscure the fact, they are concerned about the health and safety of their number one asset, their employees!

It’s to these responsible managers, and especially to the irresponsible managers, that I appeal with this article.

We are aware of the need for safety equipment such as a trench box, aka safety shoring, for shielding personnel in excavations from cave in, or gas monitors and ventilators to protect employees entering manholes or other confined spaces. How about extrication equipment, should the need arise instead of just “Send ol’ Joe in ‘cause Charlie can’t seem to make it back up the ladder!”

Yeah, we’ve all done it. Worked in trenches without shoring, entered confined spaces without checking the air or ventilating, done that lab maneuver without glasses or gloves, and SHA-ZAM! By the Grace of God, most of us are alive to brag about it! “Man, THAT was a close one!!”

But think about these two things:

#1) Which one of you in leadership (manager, foreman, competent person) wants to be the one to phone an employee’s spouse and family with the news that “Charlie, Charlene, or Joe, is hospitalized with severe injuries”, or worse, “won’t be coming home from work ever again”? Want to take valuable time off to attend a funeral? Want to try explaining to a young child why his or her mom or dad lost their life on your watch?

#2) Now you have opportunity to shop for better pricing (and I know you will!) or consider shared use / ownership with a neighbor system.

What possible economic sense does it make to procrastinate, make the call to the family, attend the services, explain to the children, endure the stigmatism of your peers or competitors, pay a HUGH O.S.H.A. fine, and THEN . . . pay a higher price and order the safety equipment which should have been prioritized in the first place to prevent all this? Hmmm, think about it. . .

Perhaps the question should be: “Can we afford *NOT* to buy it?”

Oh yes! As for Charlie, Charlene, and Joe: When your cold, heartless, only looks at the bottom line, employer DOES buy you that safety equipment, his butt is covered. My advice to you guys: **USE IT!**