Lessons Learned from The Operator

Many years ago, when we first started making brine, we had an interesting event happen to us. Let me set up the details for you. We were anti-icing our main roads for a snow event the next day. It was a sunny day; pavement temperatures were in the low to mid 20's. We had two trucks out spraying at 50 gal/lane mile of salt brine. Back at the brine maker, we had an operator that really didn't understand how the brine making process works. I was filling up with salt brine and the operator making brine was sitting in a chair reading the newspaper. After I was full, I proceeded to my route and after 45min was empty and returned to the shop to refill.

As I'm hooking up my hoses, I noticed the operator was still sitting and reading the newspaper. I asked him "how's the brine maker doing"? He replied, "ok I guess, sounds the same". Not feeling confident in his reply, I grabbed a hydrometer, to measure the salinity of the brine.

Side note for those that do not make brine, a hydrometer will float and has markings on it indicate what the salinity is. The higher it floats, the more salinity it has. Without getting into a lot of science, our brine works best when we make 23.3% brine. Kind of like anti-freeze in your car, its mixed at 50/50 for optimum freeze points. Make it leaner or stronger, it will freeze quicker.

So back to my story. I placed the hydrometer in the brine maker, and it sunk to the bottom… About the same time, a supervisor came running back to the brine maker and asked, "What the hell is going on? We have cars crashing everywhere we have brined!" It was then I realized the operator making brine had not added any salt to the brine maker in over an hour and that we were applying straight water to roads with pavement temperatures in the mid 20's. We had to load up some sand to regain traction and try to do something about the blackeye we gave ourselves.

What did we learn from this? Get the right people to do the right jobs. Maybe better training?

It’s hard for us to talk about our failures, but the most important thing is, did we learn from our failures? Please feel free to comment below and share some of your lessons learned. Maybe by sharing, we can help others that are just getting started.

Bonus quiz time-

Let’s see how many are reading this. We know salt brine is made at 23.3%. At what percentage is salt brine most corrosive? If we have a tie, we will draw the names out of a hat to determine the winner.

Please email your answers to: mailto:Kathrine@psassoc.org before the next issues comes out and the winner will receive a $25 gift card.