

“Recalibrate Our Thinking”
As appeared in ISHN’s “FDO”
January 2003

Michael R. Byrne, Senior Director for Response and Recovery Office of Homeland Security, spoke at the SEDA (Safety Equipment Distributors Association – www.safetycentral.org) Breakfast during NSC (National Safety Congress) held in San Diego in October.

Near the end of Mr. Byrne’s talk (a retired career FDNY firefighter) he offered a personal plea for product standardization – or product compatibility.

He mentioned an example where a firefighter from Bronx crossing over into nearby Yonkers could not hook up to their fire hydrants without a special adapter.

I too, as many know, have for a long time been interested in this (somewhat unpopular) topic, along with my other “standards” topic concerns (i.e. international safety product standards and international safety standards).

This lack of product compatibility in such things as a respiratory filter interchangeability, air supply bottle compatibility, hardware fittings compatibility, standard PPE fit and sizes, etc. obviously presents a major challenge in our industry. When, in an emergency, (or any time really) a need presents itself for air bottles (cylinders), they should all fit any equipment. When using respiratory cartridges, you should not have to specify (“Brand”) name, only cartridge Type – similar to when protective clothing is being used that everyone is using the same size, so they all fit properly to an ANSI size standard (such as the previous ANSI Limited Use Standard 101-1996).

We as an industry continue to improve and mature in this area but now is the time for a “giant” step up for change in terms of compatibility and globalization – especially if we are to expand our business horizons and opportunities but more importantly our moral obligations to the end user.

Now, Mr. Byrne, an outsider to our industry, again in Washington DC at the Fall Meeting of ISEA (International Safety Equipment Association www.safetyequipment.org) brings up the question – no - a plea for change – product compatibility.

We must act with a sense of responsibility and urgency for product compatibility. We must do our part for national preparedness in cooperation and coordination of product standardization and compatibility needs with information sharing.

We certainly also have the liability and originality issues to deal with, neither of which is small.

It is not suggested to develop an all commodity market here – only where it makes sense should product compatibility be implemented primarily emergency applications such as Homeland Security.

To me, it’s inevitable. If we don’t do so, on our own – who will? – you bet – Uncle Sam.

Let’s recalibrate our thinking.

Think about it.
George J. Hayward