

CLEARING OF EQUIPMENT AND PIPING

One of the responsibilities of operators is to clear equipment and piping for maintenance work. There are a few general rules that apply no matter what is being cleared. The main thing is that the equipment or piping must be cleared so that maintenance workers are not subjected to unsafe working conditions. It must be remembered that the maintenance workers are not as aware as operators are of how to treat various chemicals. They also do not have a good understanding of plant operating procedures and piping systems.

Another very important consideration is tagging of equipment and piping by the lead operator. The lead operator has the same responsibility towards tagging as a supervisor does when the supervisor issues a welding or vessel entry permit. He is saying in writing (hanging a signed tag), that the equipment is then safe for maintenance mechanics to work on. One other thing that should be done when extensive piping systems are tagged is to trace out the piping carefully for all tagging locations. Do not depend on remembering all the block valve locations. It is not a bad idea to get someone (another lead operator or operator) to double check the tagging of a complex piping system.

A third factor that must be considered in all cases is to make sure that it is possible to purge completely through a cleared piece of equipment or piping. Also purges at low points must be possible to make sure these drains are not plugged.

The above discussion is to cover general considerations for clearing. However, there must be detailed written instructions covering the clearing of equipment and piping for each of the chemicals that are in our processes. The instructions must contain specific information about the hazard potential of the chemicals. More complete information about all process chemicals is in the operating manual safety section. The clearing instructions for each chemical are listed separately so that revisions to procedures may be easily made when improved methods are realized. Please do not hesitate to offer suggestions for changes in these written procedures.