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TRAINING UPDATE

Adopting New Technology

Many of us remember the Beta versus VHS argument from – twenty? – years ago. There are many who believe Beta was the better technology for video tape recorders, but lived to regret purchasing Beta machines when VHS came to dominate the market. (Of course, DVDs now dominate, at least for the present.)

At the recent World of Concrete in Las Vegas (North America's largest trade show), I was asked to investigate manufacturers of high cycle saws used in concrete cutting and coring. I assumed that this was a new technology. It turns out such saws have been around since the 1960's but just haven't been widely adopted – at least not as widely in North America as in Europe. It turns out that the training required for high cycle saws is not overly demanding; tradespersons able to operate more conventional saws will usually be able to operate high cycle saws with some differences, for example in maintenance.

For training organizations, trying to stay ahead of the curve can be a mistake. A few years ago, we purchased gasoline-powered torches based on being impressed by demonstrations of the speed and efficiency of the equipment. It turned out to be a mistake, thankfully not a costly one. Propane-powered and oxy-acetylene cutting torches still dominate in demolition. The reason gasoline torches have not been widely adopted in Ontario may simply be due to failure of marketing by the distributor.

A few years before that, we avoided getting involved with plastic forms for concrete. Plastic forming systems were on display in Las Vegas last week; they're still around. However, plastic forms are more practical in residential where they can be used and reused and are generally only required in standard sizes, than in Industrial/Commercial/Institutional construction. We need to be aware of new technologies in concrete formwork, and in fact I brought back several CDs and catalogues of Peri Forms, Meva Forms, and others. But we need to be sure that any new or different systems are going to be adopted in the industry and that, therefore, training on these systems will have advantages for our members.

We try to keep up. However, good training in conventional construction methods and in health and safety and basic skills is the best preparation for being able to adapt to new technologies when they appear.