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Size Doesn't Matter for Safety Rules

Small retailers can receive big benefit from ResponsibleAg

Alan Mahoney has been teaching people about safety for as long as he can remember. As the training officer for his local volunteer fire department and former safety trainer at his MFA retail location where he was once the Chemical and Fertilizer Manager, Mahoney has safety in his veins.

In 1990, he moved to the corporate MFA office, to help start a company-wide safety and environmental program. Mahoney served as the initial Safety, Environmental and Regulatory Manager for MFA Incorporated until his retirement in 2016.

Changing the narrative for small retailers

In 2014, Mahoney added another title to his impressive



For small locations with limited manpower, it can be hard to stay on top of the many rules and regulations that apply to retail facilities.

resume – Credentialed Auditor for ResponsibleAg. In 2013, the tragic explosion at a fertilizer plant in West, Texas, drew nationwide attention to agricultural retailers. Mahoney remembers why he decided to become an auditor.

"It was evident we had to change people's perspective in the ag retail industry," Mahoney says. "I thought it was important that something be done, and when The Fertilizer Institute and the Ag Retailers Association came up with a way to do it through the ResponsibleAg program, I was more than happy to help."

At the time of the incident in Texas, there seemed to be two schools of thought

concerning ag retailers. Large retail organizations and facilities were routinely inspected by the governmental compliance agencies. But smaller retailers didn't seem to garner the same inspection schedule or scrutiny prior to the West, Texas, incident. Now agencies are more apt to look at those smaller operations.

"They (small retailers) often don't have the manpower needed, which can cause things to slip through the cracks. For small, independent retailers, with so many rules and regulations, it takes somebody a lot of hours a year to stay on top of things. It's easy to get behind or miss things," Mahoney says. "For many reasons, it's important to be able to get the information to small retailers to help them keep up with all the regulations." Membership in ResponsibleAg can help small – as well as large – retailers maintain correct safety practices and comply with federal regulations.



Alan Mahoney serves on the ResponsibleAg Technical Committee and travels the country as an independent ResponsibleAg Credentialed Auditor.



Since the explosion in West, Texas, regulatory agencies are more apt to inspect smaller operations.

ResponsibleAg paves the way

ResponsibleAg's primary goal is to ensure the proper storage and handling of farm input supplies to keep employees, customers and communities safe. For member organizations and facilities, this industry initiative helps ensure that they comply with regulations from OSHA, EPA, DOT and DHS. It is a comprehensive program that provides a systematic approach to continuous improvement, as well as a collection of resources members can use for information and education.

"It's important to get information out to small retailers who may not have the resources to keep up with all the regulations."

– Alan Mahoney



ALAN MAHONEY
Mahoney Safety, LLC

ResponsibleAg's audit process helps retailers identify areas they need to improve. It also provides a corrective action plan to address any issues and help facility managers become compliant within a specific timeframe.

Says Mahoney, "As an auditor, I want to make sure I am giving them a fresh set of eyes. Sometimes they don't understand the full intent of the regulation. I provide clarification on the way the retailer needs to do things because I see things differently than a manager. We can discuss the differences.

Maybe a regulation has changed. Or now you must keep records where you didn't before. I believe that's part of why this program is so important."

Staying current on regulations is key

Clarification is important to Mahoney. He is also a member of the ResponsibleAg Technical Committee, which develops the ResponsibleAg Assessment Checklist auditors use when inspecting a facility. "Retailers are going to industry events, seminars and some agency trainings, but they don't get all the details provided through the assessment checklist during an audit of the facility," Mahoney says. Mahoney and the committee monitor any regulation changes in the industry

and meet to incorporate those changes into the assessment questions and to update the ResponsibleAg Compliance Assistance Library.

During his time as safety manager at MFA, Mahoney believes the ResponsibleAg program was a valuable resource. It helped the organization identify areas for

improvement and maintain safety compliance for the company and, most importantly, the employees.

"It's hard to find employees," Mahoney says. "It's hard to recruit good employees and keep them. I believe one of the best ways to keep employees is to show interest in their safety. We must provide them a safe workplace. I think ResponsibleAg helps with that."

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ResponsibleAg is an industry-led initiative **committed** to helping agribusinesses properly store and handle farm input supplies. The program helps members ensure they are **compliant** with environmental, health, safety and security regulations to keep employees, customers and our communities **safe**.

