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S.O.P. for Fire prevention in CCI cotton stock- a case study.

Cotton plant (genus gossypium,) offers soft, fluffy staple fibre that grows in a boll, or protective capsule, around the seeds of cotton. Nature's gift "Cotton" separated from its seeds is technically known as "Lint". Lint is a highly inflammable commodity right from the crop stage to that of finished products. Every stage from procurement, processing, storage, transportation to trading is fraught with the imminent danger of instant fire. It may be "flash fire or burrowing fire". The causes of fire may be many. It may be due to negligence, accident, mechanical fatigue, arson and supernatural act, etc.



It is a case study of turnaround in mitigating fire incidents in the CCI Cotton operations from cotton season 2008 to 2011. In the cotton season 2008-09 the figures of fire incidents had spiraled up to as high as 172 which with the strict implementation of S.O.P. for fire prevention were brought **down to 3** in the next cotton season. It was a herculean task to reduce the number of fire incidents in the area of jurisdiction of CCI spread across the cotton growing states of the country.

Fire in the cotton bales of CCI stocked in a Godown:



In CCI in order to curb the fire incidents and get them to “zero fire incidents” an in-depth study of the CCI field operations was done by me as newly appointed CVO. Through the SWOT analysis, the whole operation necessitated a simplified STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE(S.O.P.) for the field officers and men of CCI to curtail the fire incidents and thus avert the National loss. The S.O.P. draft was the upshot of sincere and painstaking efforts for fire prevention. Through S.O.P. a sensitization campaign was launched. The basic features which were catalogued and underlined in the S.O.P. are summarized here:

(1) Be vigilant and a keen observant about the surroundings.



(Fire turns “white gold” into “charcoal”)

Basic safety norms should always be kept alive in the mind. For instance, the “un insulated live electrical wire” dangling near the cotton heap, lint and bales should be repaired immediately and made orderly. The places where presence of cotton stock in any form is there that area should be declared as no smoking area. It should be executed in letter and spirit. As a mission,

proper checking, propaganda and sensitization should be carried out to stop people from smoking cigarettes etc near the cotton stock. Any source of fire spark like vehicles should be stopped and allowed to go near cotton stock, if necessary, not without fire attesters on the silencers of the cotton carrying vehicles. The heaps should always be covered with sufficient tarpaulins with sufficient intermediary space between heaps. The fire fighting paraphernalia (water hydrants, fire extinguishers, sand and water filled buckets, water reservoirs etc) in the vicinity where cotton is stored or processed should be as prescribed by the experts and specialized agencies to counter the existing degree of fire threat. The cotton stock should never be too near the water hydrants as it would hamper the fire fighting operation in the unfortunate time of fire. Its preparedness should be checked as a regular safety drill besides surprise checks. The resident staff and security should know their respective duties in the event of fire incident.(e-mail of CVO to CMD CCI etc dated 24th Jan 2009).

(2) Sincere and serious about one's duties.

Regular supervision followed by personal example of leading from the front should be there to check the safety and security of cotton stock. Visual, nasal and physical supervision should go hand in hand. The moment smoke is either seen or smelt, immediate remedial measures should be undertaken like using the available fire fighting mechanism and instant calling for the help from the fire services and police. Safety of people working in the areas of cotton operation should be accorded priority and then with team work the operation to quell the fire should be undertaken in full swing to save the unaffected cotton.(e-mail of CVO to CMD, CCI etc dated,4th Feb 2009, visual and physical inspection of CCI stock in Godowns:)

(3) Vigilance by the people.

Motivate the labors, management and self propelled people through personal meetings and workshops to help CCI in conducting fire-incident-free operations in the segments like cotton procurement, processing, storage transport etc. Similarly, some people should be contacted to be the spotters and informants for keeping an eye on the people with dubious antecedents. The person should be rewarded by the management (of factory or the CCI) for providing any actionable information which resulted in the prevention of fire in the cotton stock of CCI.

(4)A cult of Panchnama:

In order to check the fire incidents, a novel method of exhibiting transparency in CCI Cotton operation was introduced in the form of Panchnama / memorandum. In the event of fire incident in CCI stock, Vigilance Officers were duty bound to draw samples of the burnt and unaffected cotton and send it for "quality testing" in the Govt. approved laboratories. These samples of cotton etc were to be drawn in the presence of the people there and they had to sign these memorandum as witnesses. If such sample failed to measure up to the Govt. mandated standards of cotton then it would attract legal as well as departmental action against the aberrant. It, in fact, proved to be a potent tool for maintaining quality in the CCI cotton operations.

Indeed, some inputs can certainly be drawn from the above, common sense driven S.O.P. of Cotton Corporation of India. In view of the above, it is aptly appropriate to quote Benjamin Franklin, "An ounce of prevention is better than pound of cure."