
NEWSLETTER

NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER S.E.E.

JULY 2012

President's Message

One of the most important things that must be done prior to moving into a job is to notify the public. As blasters, being proactive in creating positive relations with the public, helps promote goodwill for all of us in the blasting industry. It sounds simple enough but if it is not done properly, it can open the door to a host of other problems. It just takes one citizen to turn a job into a nightmare.

If we invest time and care into promoting positive public relations prior to starting a job, we can avoid the inevitable pitfalls, such as complaints directly and indirectly from neighbors, onsite visits from Code Enforcement Officers and other State and Local officials, and work stoppage or permits revoked. Inevitably this adds time and cost to projects, something general contractors do not wish to cover. We can't plan ahead for everything, but a little basic pre-planning and communicating with the public can curtail most problems for us as blasters, along with the general contractor, town officials, and ultimately the property owner.

As an industry, we need to do a better job of promoting and selling ourselves and our abilities. We can't continue to operate in the manner that we have in the past. We have seen an increase from local governments writing regulations to control our business, from notification processes, pre-blast surveys, water testing, etc - all to gain the important permit. Most of the regulations are written and implemented without input from our industry - they tend to be knee-jerk reactions to calm vocal citizens who have spoken out against the impending, current, and/or post blasting activity.

One of the tools we have employed, include personally meeting with those who will be most impacted by blasting, the neighbors. Introducing yourself and taking time to inform them of the blasting process, can start a positive relationship with the neighbors and create a degree of comfort before you even show up with equipment. Answering questions and offering to put them on a call list for notification prior to detonating a blast can go a long way in gaining their trust and respect with the process.

It is up to us, the Blasting Industry, to look at what we do and continue to improve our relations with the public. If we can't do this, then we can expect to see more rules, regulations and restrictions from local governments, which could lead to no blasting zones in towns. So it's up to us, the Blasting Industry, to work together and keep our public informed and comfortable about what we all love to do.

Your comments would be appreciated and welcomed.

Respectfully:

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Neighborly Manners: How Listening Now Will Save You Money Later

Blasters should consider good relationships with neighboring property owners integral to a successful project with a less-litigious atmosphere. With continued urban expansion and the growth of blasting operations near densely populated areas, blasters continue to face public relations challenges. Reaching out to nearby property owners about a blasting project is therefore vital and should be part of any blaster's business plans.

While pre-blast surveys are a useful tool to communicate with nearby property owners to a blasting site (e.g. Massachusetts' 527 CMR § 13.09(10)), setting expectations with all neighbors, even those not requiring such a survey, is critical in minimizing claims. When blast effects intrude upon neighboring property owners' comfort, strained relations often arise between operators, residents, businesses and even surrounding communities, causing delay and expense.

One "violent" blast can permanently alienate neighbors. Of course, what may be a minor blast to you may be an extremely violent blast to neighbors of the blast site. Thus, taking the time to reach out to neighbors, developing rapport, outlining the details of what the blasting job will entail, setting expectations, and keeping an open line of communication are all key steps to reducing claims and headaches.

Even if a blaster takes those steps, there will still likely be property owners near any blast site that are intent on stopping a project and creating havoc for the blaster and general contractor. However, many neighbors will be less inclined to run to the courthouse if they feel they have been heard. Having defended many baseless property damage claims in which damage is allegedly due to vibrations, we have found that a common denominator among most of the claims is the property owners' angst at not being treated well or fairly by a blaster or general contractor. In short, these claimants simply do not feel that their concerns have been heard, or their questions answered.

For example, whether it is due to ground vibration or air blast, structural responses can result to offsite homes or buildings. Most homeowners mistakenly believe that any movement in window glass or house structure originates from ground vibrations striking the foundation of the house. In fact, however, the concussion elements of air blasts are often the cause of such effects. Taking the time to explain the science of blasting to nearby property owners can go a long way in reducing fears and therefore reducing claims. Neighbors should be informed that each blasting site differs, and that as each blast occurs, more information is learned that will help limit any damage to their homes and structures.

Complaints about noise and vibration can be overcome through careful blast design with effective use of delays, careful monitoring of blast effects and, again, by meeting with neighbors to answer their questions and explain the care and safety precautions used to protect their property and safety.

Good blasters will also continue to analyze blast design, monitor effectively and maintain accurate records. Completing these tasks will further help reduce complaints. Furthermore, it is our experience that when defending blasting cases involving alleged property damage, fully