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Although conference and trade show attendance has been off recently, a couple of user group conferences in which I've been able to participate have bucked the trend. Perhaps it is because the condition assessment technology vendors sponsoring these particular events do such a good job facilitating the exchange of information.

I heard a number of great presentations on how organizations are leveraging various maintenance technologies. Here are two examples:

A government laboratory where operating funds are being reduced 10 percent a year over a 4-year period is using condition-based maintenance to help compensate for the loss of funding. It is an appropriate strategy for attacking maintenance costs while supporting availability of research equipment.

A processing company increased its competitive position by a proactive maintenance process that includes a precision alignment policy that specifies alignment targets and tolerances for critical machinery. After a jump in the first year when the policy was initiated, maintenance costs have declined steadily because there are fewer failures and the length of time between scheduled maintenance has increased. Meanwhile, product unit costs have declined steadily because of increased equipment capacity and availability.

However, amongst the many success stories, there was considerable conversation

about the difficulty in obtaining resources for condition assessment operations, about the precipitous decline in reliability and maintenance capability in many organizations, and even about plants that are sliding back into the morass of reactive maintenance.

What is going on? While conference attendees are pushing forward with condition assessment technologies and reaping the benefits of proactive maintenance, they often receive increasing pushback from upper management. Proactive maintenance is not an extravagance. It is a value-adding function that produces plant capacity. What's the matter with these managers? Evidently, they just don't get it.

I always thought a responsible manager of a business should endeavor to protect the value of the company's equipment and insure that it is available to meet market demand. It has been said that rational people consider the consequences of their actions. If so, there must be a reason why so many managers are destroying their company's reliability and maintenance capability. What is it? Now, I don't get it. Can anyone explain it to me? **MT**