

Kaizen Korner

From Elaine's Desk

Every time I get a new lead on a continuous improvement project to write about, I come away with the same thought ... our guys amaze me! This month I had the pleasure of talking to John Baumann about several improvements made when he and some of his co-workers' suggested them at and around the saw area in the Fab Shop. John recently completed a kaizen that will help anyone using the saw do so more safely and efficiently when having the task of cutting larger quantities of the same stock.



Q. So John ... what was the problem?

A. We couldn't throw a bundle of like-material on the saw and then roll one piece at a time to be sawed. This was because the bundles would weigh down the table feeder rolls and prevent the rolls from turning to move the metal up to the saw. So it took a long time to pick up each piece of material, like pipe and angle, off the skid with the overhead crane and load it onto the saw individually.

A while ago, I came up with an idea to use wooden blocks. I would put them on the side of the saw with the bundled material on top. That system was better than what we had been doing but the blocks were wobbly and with all that weight stacked on top, I felt that it wasn't the safest method.

Q. So how did you improve your previous improvement?

A. I was working on a job where I had to saw cut a lot of large pipes. This required slow saw cuts to keep things squared. So as I oversaw the job, I tried to think about a more safe and efficient way for me or anyone else running the saw, to handle larger amounts of the same material.

I came up with the idea when I noticed these old handles on the side of the saw. They were a little messed up so I did some reconstruction work on them. Then I fabricated two brackets and welded them across the rollers on the saw table. So now, I turn the handle and flip the brackets up, place the bundle of material on the top platform and use a crow bar to bring each one down and then slide the material into position for the saw. Because of the brackets on each end, the material cannot roll off the table. This modification is so much safer and saves a lot of time moving the heavy material from place to place.

That same day, before the pipe job was done, the saw rolls were modified, too. So it didn't take additional time to do the fabrication/installation work and I used scrap material so it didn't cost anything in materials either. I've been using the new system for about a week now and it's been working out great so far.

Q. Is this the first kaizen project you have completed?

A. Noooooooo! I submitted paperwork for 8 or 9 this year.

Q. What were some of the others?

A. It is hard to cut large diameter pipe and keep it squared off and even. So I came up with this simple flat bar system. I welded brackets onto the front of the saw to hold a piece of flat bar. When I need it, I stand it upright in the back of the saw in another set of brackets. Then I use a "square" to check for even cuts. It is really easy and so much more efficient.

Q. Do you have any other ideas?

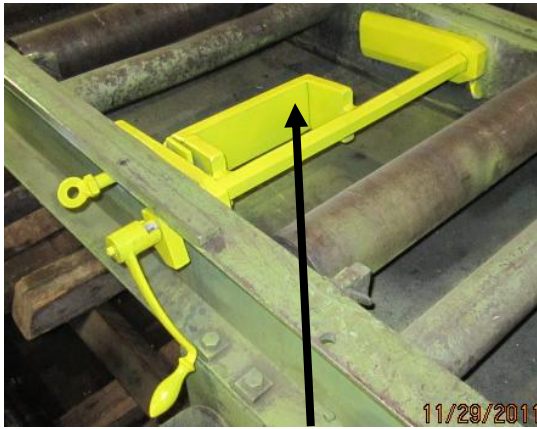
A. I am working on one now ... I'm building a small holding table for the punch. I already have the pieces cut from scrap and I am just waiting for a break in the action to put it together. A lot of times we have to punch a bunch of small parts at a time. We balance them on the side of the punch ledge but the vibrations from the punch make the fall and it's frustrating. So a small table will really help out a lot and it's a simple fix.

The other question I asked was "why don't we recycle plastic bottles?" We recycle cans but not bottles. So I'm writing up a kaizen for that. It shouldn't take much to implement and I think it would reflect well on the company. We recycle so many other things, too.

Q. You seem like to have a lot of fun with continuous improvement projects!?

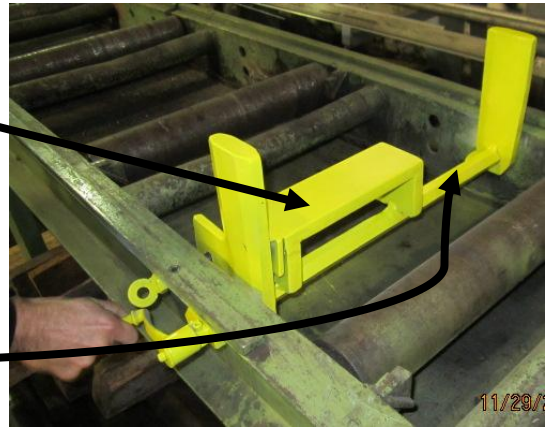
A. I try to! On one hand it is kind of hard to see them through because I get moved around the shop a lot. But on the other hand, it works to my benefit because I see a lot more stuff that can be improved.

Good stuff, John ... thank you, and others who have initiated and also assisted in completing kaizen events, for making a positive difference within our business!

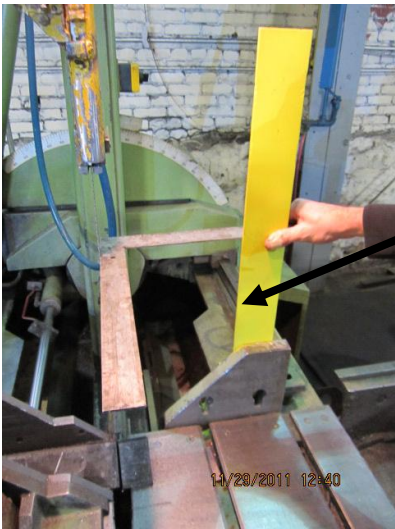


The bundles sit here.

Then they are pushed onto here one by one to roll into the saw area as needed.



New appendage rests below the rolls when not needed



This simple flat bar fixture and a square assures pipes are sawed straight.

Another kaizen required spacers on the inventory shelves to divide sizes and types of long stock and also hold pieces that were shorter than the standard size.

