



# **POLLUTION PREVENTION:**

***METHODOLOGY,  
TECHNOLOGIES  
AND PRACTICES***

by

**Kenneth L. Mulholland and James A. Dyer**



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To our wives  
Cathy and Yvette

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# Table of Contents

<b>Dedication</b> .....	i
<b>Foreword</b> .....	xiii
<b>Preface</b> .....	xv
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	xvii
<b>Epigraph</b> .....	xix
<b>CHAPTER 1: Why Pollution Prevention?</b>	
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1.2 Waste As Pollution</b> .....	1
<b>1.3 How is Pollution Prevention Defined?</b> .....	2
<b>1.4 Drivers for Pollution Prevention</b> .....	3
<b>1.5 Pollution-Prevention Wisdom</b> .....	6
1.5.1 Waste Stream Analysis .....	6
1.5.2 Process Analysis .....	8
<b>1.6 Scope of This Book</b> .....	8
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	8
<b>CHAPTER 2: The Path to Pollution Prevention</b>	
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	9
<b>2.2 The Recipe for Success</b> .....	9
<b>2.3 Program Elements</b> .....	10
2.3.1 Chartering Phase .....	10
<i>Business Leadership Decision to Start</i> .....	10
<i>Establishing the Program</i> .....	11
<i>Selecting the Waste Streams</i> .....	11
<i>Creating an Assessment Team</i> .....	11
2.3.2 Assessment Phase .....	11
<i>Collect Data</i> .....	11
<i>Set Goals</i> .....	11
<i>Define Problem</i> .....	11
<i>Generate Options</i> .....	11
<i>Screen Options</i> .....	11
<i>Evaluate the Screened Options</i> .....	11
2.3.3 Implementation Phase .....	11
<b>2.4 The Incentive for Pollution Prevention</b> .....	11
2.4.1 New End-of-Pipe Treatment .....	12
<i>Gas Streams</i> .....	12
<i>Wastewater Streams</i> .....	12
2.4.2 Raw-Materials Cost .....	12
2.4.3 Cost of Manufacture .....	12
<b>2.5 Pollution-Prevention Engineering Technologies and Practices</b> .....	12
<b>2.6 Engineering Evaluation of the Preferred Options</b> .....	12
<b>2.7 Waste Stream and Process Analyses</b> .....	13
<b>2.8 Case Studies</b> .....	13
2.8.1 Program Elements: U.S. EPA and DuPont Chambers Works Waste-Minimization Project .....	13
2.8.2 Incentive for Pollution Prevention—Gas-Flow-Rate Reduction .....	13
2.8.3 Waste Stream Analysis: Nonaqueous Cleaning .....	14

2.8.4 Process Analysis: Replace Solvent with a Process Intermediate, Product, or Feed. . . . .	14
<b>Literature Cited. . . . .</b>	<b>14</b>

## **CHAPTER 3: Pollution Prevention Program Development**

<b>3.1 Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.2 Regulations . . . . .</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.3 A Successful Pollution-Prevention Program . . . . .</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.4 Program Elements . . . . .</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.5 Chartering Phase . . . . .</b>	<b>17</b>
3.5.1 Business Leadership Decision to Start . . . . .	17
3.5.2 Establishing the Program . . . . .	17
<i>Convening a Meeting to Roll Out the Program. . . . .</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Appoint a Team Leader . . . . .</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Establish Metrics . . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Quickly Define the Initial Economic Incentive for Pollution Prevention . . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Create Incentives for Pollution Prevention. . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Involve a Diverse Group of People . . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
3.5.3 Selecting the Waste Streams. . . . .	18
<i>Identify Area Waste Streams . . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Prioritize Waste Streams . . . . .</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Select the Targeted Waste Streams . . . . .</i>	<i>20</i>
3.5.4 Creating a Core Assessment Team . . . . .	20
<b>3.6 Assessment Phase . . . . .</b>	<b>20</b>
3.6.1 Collect Data. . . . .	20
<i>Process Flowsheets with Mass and Energy Balances . . . . .</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Process Chemistry . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Regulatory Background . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Raw Materials/Production Information and Forecasts . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Accounting Information . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Other Information . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
3.6.2 Set Goals . . . . .	21
3.6.3 Define the Problem . . . . .	21
<i>Perform an Area Inspection . . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Perform Waste-Stream and Process Analyses. . . . .</i>	<i>21</i>
3.6.4 Show Stoppers. . . . .	22
3.6.5 Generate Options . . . . .	22
<i>Data Collection and Information Package . . . . .</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Selection of Team Members . . . . .</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Information Analysis . . . . .</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>The Brainstorming Session. . . . .</i>	<i>26</i>
3.6.6 Screening the Options . . . . .	29
3.6.7 Evaluate the Screened Options. . . . .	31
<b>3.7 Implementation Phase . . . . .</b>	<b>33</b>
3.7.1 Select Options for Implementation. . . . .	33
3.7.2 Create Preliminary Implementation Plan . . . . .	33
3.7.3 Secure Approval for Implementation and Begin Implementation Projects. . . . .	34
3.7.4 Keep People Involved . . . . .	34
<b>3.8 Resources . . . . .</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.9 When Should You Do Pollution Prevention?. . . . .</b>	<b>35</b>
3.9.1 Pollution Prevention during Research and Development . . . . .	35
3.9.2 Pollution Prevention during Process and Design Engineering. . . . .	36
3.9.3 Pollution Prevention during Process Operation. . . . .	36



<b>3.10 Case Studies</b> .....	37
3.10.1 R&D Phase .....	37
<i>Waste Reduction Through Control of the Reaction Pathway</i> .....	37
<i>Waste Reduction Through Catalyst Selection</i> .....	37
3.10.2 Process and Design Engineering Phase .....	37
<i>Reuse Reaction Water in Wash Step</i> .....	37
<i>Groundwater Protection</i> .....	37
3.10.3 Existing Process Operation .....	37
<i>Solvent Elimination</i> .....	37
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	38

## **CHAPTER 4: Economics of Pollution Prevention**

<b>4.1 Introduction</b> .....	39
<b>4.2 End-of-Pipe Treatment Cost as the Incentive for Pollution Prevention</b> .....	40
<b>4.3 Economic Criteria for Technology Comparisons</b> .....	40
4.3.1 Net Present Value .....	40
<i>Cash Costs (Operating and Overhead)</i> .....	41
<i>Total Costs</i> .....	41
4.3.2 Investment .....	41
<b>4.4 End-of-Pipe VOC and HVOC Treatment Technology Selection</b> .....	42
4.4.1 Costs Associated with Permit Applications .....	44
4.4.2 Investment, Cash Operating Cost, and Net Present Cost .....	45
<b>4.5 Particulate Control Technologies</b> .....	45
4.5.1 Investment, Cost, and Economics .....	45
4.5.2 Technology Description .....	45
<i>Demisters</i> .....	47
<i>Cyclones</i> .....	47
<i>Wet Scrubbers</i> .....	47
<i>Filters</i> .....	48
<i>Electrostatic Precipitators</i> .....	48
4.5.3 Technology Selection .....	48
<b>4.6 Biological Wastewater Treatment Technologies</b> .....	48
4.6.1 Applicable Technologies .....	49
4.6.2 Incentive For Source Reduction For New Facilities .....	49
4.6.3 Investment and Costs For Aerobic Deep-Tank Activated-Sludge Treatment Facilities .....	50
<b>4.7 Nonbiological Wastewater Treatment Technologies</b> .....	50
4.7.1 Incentive for Pollution Prevention .....	50
4.7.2 Nonbiological End-of-Pipe Technology Selection Map .....	51
4.7.3 Investment, Cost, and Economics for Individual Technologies .....	52
<i>Air Stripping Plus Thermal Oxidation of the Off-Gas</i> .....	52
<i>Steam Stripping Plus Incineration of the Condensed Organic Phase</i> .....	52
<i>Granular Activated Carbon Adsorption Plus Carbon Regeneration by a Vendor</i> .....	52
<i>Reverse Osmosis Plus Incineration of the Concentrate</i> .....	53
<i>UV/Hydrogen Peroxide Advanced Oxidation</i> .....	53
<i>Fenton Reaction and Precipitation</i> .....	53
<i>Electron-Beam Irradiation</i> .....	53
<i>Wet Oxidation</i> .....	53
<b>4.8 Solid-Waste Treatment Costs</b> .....	53
<b>4.9 Examples</b> .....	56
4.9.1 High-Flow, VOC-Laden Air Stream .....	56
4.9.2 Moderate-Flow, HVOC-Laden Air Stream .....	60
4.9.3 Waste-Gas Stream with VOCs and Particulates .....	61
4.9.4 New Biotreatment Facility for an Existing Manufacturing Site .....	61

<b>4.10 Engineering Evaluations and Pollution Prevention</b> .....	62
4.10.1 What is Engineering Evaluation? .....	62
4.10.2 How Does It Work? .....	62
4.10.3 Where Is It Valuable? .....	63
<b>4.11 The 10-Step Method</b> .....	63
4.11.1 Define Problem and Set Goals (Steps 1 and 2) .....	63
4.11.2 Identify the Alternatives (Step 3) .....	66
4.11.3 Define the Alternatives (Steps 4 and 5) .....	66
4.11.4 Evaluate the Alternatives (Steps 6 through 10) .....	66
<b>4.12 Shortcut NPV Method</b> .....	68
4.12.1 Data Requirements .....	68
4.12.2 Calculating NPV .....	72
4.12.3 Basis of the Shortcut Method .....	73
4.12.4 Adjustments to the NPV Estimations Due to Project Timing .....	73
4.12.5 Comments on NPV Method .....	73
4.12.6 An Example .....	78
<b>4.13 Waste-Management Economics: A Balanced Approach</b> .....	78
4.13.1 The Path To Better Solutions .....	78
4.13.2 Incremental Costs Of Waste Treatment .....	79
4.13.3 How Should You Use These Incremental Costs? .....	79
4.13.4 Characteristics of a Balanced Approach .....	80
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	80

**CHAPTER 5: Case Study**

<b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....	81
<b>5.2 Background of Case Study</b> .....	81
<b>5.3 Chartering Phase</b> .....	82
5.3.1 Incentive Based On End-of-Pipe Treatment .....	82
5.3.2 Lost-Product Value Incentive for Pollution Prevention .....	83
<b>5.4 Assessment Phase</b> .....	84
5.4.1 Collect Data .....	84
5.4.2 Set Goals .....	84
5.4.3 Define the Problem .....	85
5.4.4 Generate Ideas .....	87
5.4.5 Screen Ideas .....	90
5.4.6 Evaluate the Screened Ideas .....	94
<b>5.5 Implementation Phase</b> .....	94
<b>5.6 Results</b> .....	96
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	100

**CHAPTER 6: Pollution-Prevention Technologies and Practices**

<b>6.1 Introduction</b> .....	101
<b>6.2 Engineering Technologies, Operating Practices, and Unit Operations</b> .....	101
<b>6.3 Dyelate Process Case Study</b> .....	103
6.3.1 Condensation .....	103
6.3.2 Ring Closure .....	104
6.3.3 Extraction .....	104
6.3.4 Acidification and Halogenation .....	105
6.3.5 Filtration and Drying .....	107
6.3.6 Observations and Potential Process Improvement Options .....	108
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	108

**CHAPTER 7: Pollution Prevention In Batch Operations**

<b>7.1 Introduction</b> .....	109
-------------------------------	-----

<b>7.2 Nature and Sources of Emissions</b> .....	109
<b>7.3 Pollution-Prevention Strategies</b> .....	110
7.3.1 Reactor Charging .....	110
7.3.2 Reactor Operation .....	111
7.3.3 Reactor Discharging .....	112
7.3.4 Reactor Cleaning .....	113
<b>7.4 Modeling Batch Processes</b> .....	113
<b>7.5 Batch vs. Continuous Operation</b> .....	114
<b>7.6 Case Studies</b> .....	114
7.6.1 Replace an Organic Solvent with an Aqueous Solvent for Cleaning .....	114
7.6.2 Methylene Chloride Emissions Reduction .....	115
7.6.3 Conversion from Batch to Continuous Operation .....	115
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	116

## CHAPTER 8: Equipment and Parts Cleaning

<b>8.1 Introduction</b> .....	117
<b>8.2 Nature of Emission Sources</b> .....	117
<b>8.3 The Pollution-Prevention Continuum</b> .....	117
8.3.1 More Than 95% Pollution Prevention .....	117
8.3.2 More Than 90% Pollution Prevention .....	118
8.3.3 More Than 75% Pollution Prevention .....	118
8.3.4 More Than 50% Pollution Prevention .....	119
<i>High-Pressure Water Washing</i> .....	119
<i>Media Blasting</i> .....	119
<i>Aqueous Cleaning</i> .....	119
<i>Pipe-Cleaning Pigs</i> .....	120
8.3.5 More Than and Less Than 10% Pollution Prevention .....	120
8.3.6 Employee Awareness .....	121
<b>8.4 Cleaning Research</b> .....	121
<b>8.5 Case Histories</b> .....	122
8.5.1 Minimize the Need for Cleaning .....	122
8.5.2 Procedural Changes Relaxed Product Specifications .....	122
8.5.3 High-Pressure Washing .....	122
8.5.4 Waste Solvent Used For Flushing Equipment .....	123
<b>Literature Cited</b> .....	124

## CHAPTER 9: High-Value Waste

<b>9.1 Introduction</b> .....	125
<b>9.2 Regulations</b> .....	125
<b>9.3 Conversion to a High-Value Waste</b> .....	125
9.3.1 Process and Waste-Stream Constituents .....	125
9.3.2 Modify the Waste Stream .....	125
<b>9.4 The Waste-Value Continuum</b> .....	126
9.4.1 Eliminate From the Process .....	126
9.4.2 Reuse in the Process .....	126
9.4.3 Convert to Feed .....	127
9.4.4 Convert to Product .....	127
9.4.5 End-of-Pipe Treatment .....	127
<b>9.5 Case Histories</b> .....	127
9.5.1 Organic Solvents Eliminated from the Process .....	127
9.5.2 Acid Scavengers Eliminated from the Process .....	127
9.5.3 Reusing Small Quantities of Solvents in a Process .....	127
9.5.4 Wash-Solvent Reuse in Paint Formulation .....	128
9.5.5 Vinyl Acetate Recovery and Reuse .....	128
9.5.6 Reuse Sample Waste In the Process .....	129

9.5.7	Reuse, Waste Elimination, and Conversion to a Feed Material for a Herbicide Process . . . . .	129
9.5.8	Waste Segregation and Conversion to Products in Dairy Production . . . . .	129
9.5.9	Reintroduction of Waste Solids into a Polymer Process . . . . .	129
9.5.10	Nonwoven Waste Fabric Turned into a High-Value Product . . . . .	129
	<b>Literature Cited . . . . .</b>	<b>130</b>

## **CHAPTER 10: Reactor Design and Operation**

<b>10.1</b>	<b>Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>10.2</b>	<b>Pollution-Prevention Strategies . . . . .</b>	<b>131</b>
10.2.1	Consider the Impact of Solvent Selection . . . . .	131
10.2.2	Improve the Quality of Raw Materials . . . . .	132
10.2.3	Redesign the Reactor . . . . .	132
10.2.4	For Equilibrium Reactions, Recycle Byproducts . . . . .	132
10.2.5	For Sequential Reactions, Remove Product as it Forms . . . . .	133
10.2.6	Match the Mixing to the Reaction . . . . .	134
10.2.7	Improve the Way Reactants Are Added to the Reactor . . . . .	135
10.2.8	Modify Reactor Cooling or Heating . . . . .	135
10.2.9	Consider More Forgiving Regions of Operation . . . . .	137
10.2.10	Add, Change, or Optimize the Catalyst . . . . .	137
10.2.11	Optimize Reactant Feed Ratios and Addition Sequence . . . . .	137
10.2.12	Know, Analyze, and Control Critical Parameters . . . . .	137
10.2.13	Routinely Calibrate Instrumentation . . . . .	137
10.2.14	Other Strategies . . . . .	138
	<b>Literature Cited . . . . .</b>	<b>138</b>

## **CHAPTER 11: Use of Water as a Solvent and Heat Transfer Fluid**

<b>11.1</b>	<b>Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>11.2</b>	<b>The Incentive for Source Reduction of Water Use . . . . .</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>11.3</b>	<b>Water Reuse . . . . .</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>11.4</b>	<b>The Pollution-Prevention Continuum . . . . .</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>11.5</b>	<b>Pollution-Prevention Strategies . . . . .</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>11.6</b>	<b>Water Pinch Analysis . . . . .</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>11.7</b>	<b>Case Histories: Water as a Solvent . . . . .</b>	<b>143</b>
11.7.1	Water Reuse as a Solvent . . . . .	143
11.7.2	pH Control . . . . .	144
11.7.3	Water Scrubbing . . . . .	144
11.7.4	Nonaqueous Cleaning . . . . .	145
<b>11.8</b>	<b>Case Histories: Water as a Heat-Transfer Fluid . . . . .</b>	<b>145</b>
11.8.1	Noncontact Cooling . . . . .	145
11.8.2	Water Monitoring . . . . .	145
11.8.3	Water Reuse for Energy . . . . .	145
	<b>Literature Cited . . . . .</b>	<b>146</b>

## **CHAPTER 12: Organic Solvents**

<b>12.1</b>	<b>Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>12.2</b>	<b>Cost as a Driver for Pollution Prevention . . . . .</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>12.3</b>	<b>Regulations . . . . .</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>12.4</b>	<b>The Pollution-Prevention Continuum . . . . .</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>12.5</b>	<b>Source Reduction of Solvents . . . . .</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>12.6</b>	<b>Solvent Selection . . . . .</b>	<b>151</b>
12.6.1	Step 1: Identify Important Chemical and Physical Solvent Properties . . . . .	151
12.6.2	Step 2: Identify Constraints on Important Solvent Properties . . . . .	152
12.6.3	Step 3: Compile Data for all Properties and Rank Solvents Satisfying the Target Constraints . . . . .	152
12.6.4	Step 4: Evaluate the Top Solvent Candidates Using Simulation . . . . .	153
<b>12.7</b>	<b>Solvent-Selection Databases . . . . .</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>12.8</b>	<b>Case Histories . . . . .</b>	<b>154</b>

12.8.1	Solventless Process	154
12.8.2	Replace Solvent with a Process Intermediate, Product, or Feed	154
12.8.3	Water as a Solvent	154
12.8.4	Improve Solvent Recovery	154
12.8.5	Implement Solvent Recovery	154
12.8.6	Process and Equipment Improvements	155
12.8.7	Organic Solvent Selection	155
<b>Literature Cited</b>		156

## CHAPTER 13: pH Control as a Pollution-Prevention Tool

<b>13.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	157
<b>13.2</b>	<b>Pollution-Prevention Strategies</b>	157
13.2.1	Understand Whether Your Plant Adds Acid or Base to Control pH	157
13.2.2	Avoid Excessive Carbon Dioxide Scrubbing in Caustic Scrubbers	158
13.2.3	Know the $pK_a$ and $pK_b$ of Weak Organic Acids and Bases in Your Process and Their Impact on Waste Emissions	158
<b>13.3</b>	<b>Metals Solubility and pH</b>	160
13.3.1	Hydrolysis of Metal Cations	161
13.3.2	Methodology of Dyer et al. Study	162
13.3.3	The OLI Software System	162
13.3.4	Overall Metal Solubility Diagrams	162
13.3.5	The Important Role of Source Reduction and Pretreatment	163
<b>13.4</b>	<b>Case Histories</b>	164
13.4.1	Plugging of Feed Preheater and Column with Tars	164
13.4.2	Tar Formation Due to Acidity in an Incoming Raw Material	164
13.4.3	Metals Emissions in Wastewater Effluent	165
13.4.4	Copper Emissions from Reaction Step	165
<b>Literature Cited</b>		166

## CHAPTER 14: Pollution Prevention in Vacuum Processes

<b>14.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	167
<b>14.2</b>	<b>Background</b>	167
<b>14.3</b>	<b>Nature of Emission Sources</b>	167
<b>14.4</b>	<b>Regulatory Outlook</b>	167
<b>14.5</b>	<b>How Do Emissions Originate?</b>	168
14.5.1	Entrainment	168
14.5.2	Temperature of Operation	168
14.5.3	Inert Level	168
<b>14.6</b>	<b>The Pollution-Prevention Continuum</b>	168
<b>14.7</b>	<b>Source Reduction of Vacuum System Emissions</b>	169
14.7.1	Entrainment	169
	<i>Proper Vessel Design</i>	169
	<i>Vapor Line Design</i>	169
	<i>Vapor-Line Installation</i>	169
	<i>Clean Vapor to a Vacuum Device</i>	169
14.7.2	Temperature of Operation	170
14.7.3	Inerts Level	170
14.7.4	Vacuum Device	170
<b>14.8</b>	<b>Case Histories and Economics</b>	171
14.8.1	Case History #1: Degassing at High Vacuum During Polymer Production	171
14.8.2	Case History #2: Vacuum Distillation	171
<b>Literature Cited</b>		174

## CHAPTER 15: Ventilation of Manufacturing Areas

<b>15.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	175
-------------	---------------------	-----

<b>15.2</b>	<b>The Bottom Line</b>	175
<b>15.3</b>	<b>Nature and Sources of Emissions</b>	175
<b>15.4</b>	<b>Regulatory Outlook</b>	176
<b>15.5</b>	<b>The Pollution-Prevention Continuum</b>	176
15.5.1	Process Modifications to Eliminate the Contaminants	176
15.5.2	Minimize the Volume of Contaminated Air	176
15.5.3	Recirculation of Ventilation Air	178
15.5.4	Dilution or General Building Ventilation	179
15.5.5	Personal Protective Equipment	179
<b>15.6</b>	<b>The Incentive for Pollution Prevention</b>	179
<b>15.7</b>	<b>Case Histories</b>	180
15.7.1	Printing Facility	180
15.7.2	Semiconductor and Pharmaceutical Industries	180
15.7.3	Parts Cleaner	181
15.7.4	Film Facility	181
	<b>Literature Cited</b>	182

## CHAPTER 16: Volatile Organic-Liquid Storage

<b>16.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	183
<b>16.2</b>	<b>Nature of Emissions Sources</b>	183
<b>16.3</b>	<b>Regulatory Outlook</b>	183
<b>16.4</b>	<b>How Do Emissions Originate?</b>	184
16.4.1	Fixed Roof Tanks	184
16.4.2	Floating Roof Tanks	185
16.4.3	Stratification	185
16.4.4	Estimating Emissions	185
16.4.5	Fugitive Emissions (Equipment Leaks)	185
<b>16.5</b>	<b>The Pollution-Prevention Continuum</b>	185
<b>16.6</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	185
16.6.1	Source Reduction of Breathing Losses	185
16.6.2	Source Reduction of Working Losses	187
16.6.3	Other Source Reduction Approaches	187
16.6.4	Floating Roofs	187
16.6.5	Pressure Vessels	188
16.6.6	End-of-Pipe Controls	189
<b>16.7</b>	<b>Technology Selection Criteria</b>	189
16.7.1	Floating Roofs	189
16.7.2	Dedicated Control Device	190
16.7.3	Pressure Vessel	190
16.7.4	Headered Control Device	190
16.7.5	Source Reduction Options	190
<b>16.8</b>	<b>Case Histories</b>	190
16.8.1	Refrigerated Vent Condenser	190
16.8.2	Headered Vent System	190
16.8.3	Floating Roofs	190
16.8.4	Pressure Vessels	191
	<b>Literature Cited</b>	192

## CHAPTER 17: Separation Technology Selection

<b>17.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	193
<b>17.2</b>	<b>Pollution-Prevention Strategies</b>	193
17.2.1	Selection Heuristics	193
17.2.2	Separation Unit-Operation Selection	195
<b>17.3</b>	<b>Unit Operation Parameters</b>	195
17.3.1	Distillation	196

17.3.2	Crystallization	196
17.3.3	Liquid–Liquid Extraction	197
17.3.4	Adsorption	197
17.3.5	Membranes	198
<b>17.4</b>	<b>Case Histories</b>	<b>199</b>
17.4.1	Distillation: New Design Criteria	199
17.4.2	Distillation: Recovery of Waste	199
17.4.3	Crystallization: New Technology	199
17.4.4	Extraction: Thermodynamic Review	199
17.4.5	Adsorption: Technology Selection	199
17.4.6	Membrane: Process Simplification	200
	<b>Literature Cited</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>CHAPTER 18: Equipment Leaks: Regulations, Impacts, and Strategies</b>		
<b>18.1</b>	<b>Fugitive Emissions</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>18.2</b>	<b>New Regulations in Mid-1994</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>18.3</b>	<b>Recordkeeping Setup</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>18.4</b>	<b>Strategy for Valves</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>18.5</b>	<b>Learnings from a Study of Pump Seals</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>18.6</b>	<b>Strategy for Pumps</b>	<b>203</b>
	<b>Literature Cited</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: A Collection of Pollution-Prevention Opportunities</b>		
<b>A.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>A.2</b>	<b>Did You Know That...</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>A.3</b>	<b>Pollution-Prevention Opportunities List</b>	<b>205</b>
A.3.1	Process/Product Conceptualization and Development	205
A.3.2	Plant Design	206
A.3.3	Plant Operation	208
	<b>Literature Cited</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Description of Screened Ideas From Case Study</b>		
		<b>211</b>

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## Foreword

**F**or better or worse, engineers rarely make the headlines. When we do, it is a fair bet that it is the result of something gone wrong. Technology, when it works well, is (and should be) invisible. And as often is the case, so are the people who create it.

Consider an oil refinery. Few people, driving past it on their way to work, pause to wonder about the engineering feat of turning crude into the plastics that comprise much of their car, the gasoline that powers it, and the asphalt beneath the tires (which, incidentally, also had their origins in that same refinery, or one remarkably like it). In fact, it is likely that the majority of people driving past don't give the refinery a second thought at all.

Which, perhaps, is as it should be. But, on surprisingly rare occasion, something will happen to bring the inner workings of technology into the public spotlight.

One of the most interesting recent examples of this phenomenon is the so-called Year 2000 ("Y2K") problem. The problem stems from the way that early computer programmers recorded date information. Faced with the need to keep both code and data as compact as possible, programmers often truncated dates to record only the last two digits of the year. In other words, the year 1998 (the year that this book was originally published) would be recorded as "98." Obviously, this poses a potential problem for software that must track dates past the year 2000. Does a date entry of "02" stand for the year 2002, or 1902?

Public reaction to this rather arcane issue of software programming has been surprising. Reactions range from mild concern to dire predictions of the imminent demise of civilization. In the worst-case scenarios, banks will fail, the government will come grinding to a halt, and airplanes will fall from the sky. Of course, this assumes that they are still flying — as of this writing several airlines have announced that, as a precautionary measure, they will suspend all flights when the final hour arrives.

The truncation that seemed an expedient solution thirty years ago has "suddenly" introduced the one thing that computer programmer's try so hard to avoid — ambiguity.

Like many engineering problems, the Y2K problem was well understood by the people who created it. But (again, like many engineering problems) the decision that led to the problem was part of a conscious trade-off. Faced with the challenge of getting software to function

within constraints of available memory and processor speed, it was an expedient solution to a problem whose ultimate solution was assumed to lie in the future — when improved technology would make it possible to implement a more complete solution.

The problem, of course, is that the future is now.

In ways that are strikingly similar, the process industries are facing their own version of the Y2K problem, in the form of environmental wastes. Like the Y2K problem, process waste is often the result of engineering trade-offs that were made between efficiency and capital cost, and between the state of existing technology and the need to get product to market. One result of these trade-offs is waste, which in many cases can no longer be tolerated either economically or environmentally.

Think of a chemical plant as a computer program for turning raw materials into products, with the instructions (code) written in steel, rather than bytes. Like the software engineers who must examine every line of code to find a persistent bug, we are faced with the challenge of methodically "opening up" each process, and eliminating the sources of waste and pollution that threaten the environment, and threaten the viability of the industry.

This book is an instruction manual for debugging the chemical process industries.

This book will help the chemical engineer recognize pollution prevention as nothing more than a reformulation of traditional chemical engineering problem solving, and in the process provide new applications for your skills. The same reaction engineering skills that optimized processes for maximum throughput and minimum capital investment can also be applied to the challenge of re-optimizing for high selectivity and maximum efficiency. Sometimes, for example, when dealing with persistent and bioaccumulative materials, the questions may need to be rephrased in somewhat different ways — "can we live without this intermediate in our product or process?" but ultimately, it still becomes a problem amenable to a mixture of creative problem solving and fundamental technical skills learned in school and on the job.

For the non-chemical engineer, the book demonstrates in understandable terms the application of the chemical engineer's toolkit — reaction engineering, transport phenomena, equipment design, and engineering economics

— to the challenges of preventing waste in the process industries.

Finally, for all readers, the generous use of case studies and examples from process plants will help you gain an understanding of how pollution prevention techniques can be used to reduce or eliminate plant bottlenecks, improve product quality and yield, and improve overall

profitability of today's process plant.

***Scott Butner***

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## Preface

In 1994, the DuPont Company established “The DuPont Commitment” for Safety, Health, and the Environment. As part of this Commitment, the company resolved to drive toward zero waste generation at the source and zero emissions. Having spent the previous 5 years delivering on corporate goals to reduce air toxic and air carcinogen emissions, we realized the value that pollution prevention could play in improving the environment and the manufacturing process, while also making money for the business. What a concept! As a result of our work on end-of-pipe treatment of waste streams, we were also armed with valuable information on the cost of abating emissions at the tail end of the process. We quickly realized that the cost of end-of-pipe treatment could be a catalyst to help drive pollution prevention in the businesses. What was missing, however, was the ability to quickly identify feasible pollution-prevention technologies and practices that applied across multiple manufacturing processes and industries. Being chemical engineers, we envisioned a “unit operations” approach to pollution prevention.

Since 1994, we have responded to DuPont’s corporate commitment to drive toward “zero waste and emissions.” With the help and support of many colleagues at DuPont, particularly Robert W. Sylvester, we invented a structured methodology to identify the best pollution-prevention solutions for any manufacturing process, as well as a unique set of pollution technologies and practices that are based on chemical engineering know-how. In addition, we took full advantage of the important end-of-pipe treatment and economic evaluation skills and knowledge that were available to us at DuPont. We did not waste any time in leveraging this knowledge across the globe. By being proactive rather than reactive, we have helped DuPont reduce total waste generated by 300 million pounds per year, and have helped position the corporation to meet its goal of “zero waste and emissions,” while also gaining competitive advantage through faster, more effective, revenue-producing pollution-prevention programs.

The novel methodology described in this book uses a structured brainstorming process that requires minimum resources to identify chemistry and engineering changes that can be made to existing and new processes. These process improvement ideas not only reduce the amount of waste being generated, but they also make money for the business. We have participated in or led over two dozen brainstorming sessions to identify the best waste reduction. In this sense, the methodology is proven and of practical use to engineers responsible for reducing waste gen-

eration in both new and existing processes.

To support the brainstorming of ideas, we transformed an extensive database of process-specific pollution-prevention case histories within DuPont and the open literature into fundamental pollution-prevention knowledge that is applicable to all businesses around the world. Examples of this pollution-prevention knowledge include equipment and parts cleaning, optimizing the use of water, pollution prevention in batch operations, pollution prevention through reactor design and operation, pH control as a pollution-prevention tool, high-value wastes, organic solvent selection, minimizing equipment leaks, and greener separations.

This extensive knowledge was then further simplified to a set of pollution-prevention “wisdoms” that are easily understood and broadly applicable. This fundamental knowledge allows plant operations personnel to have just as important a role in pollution prevention as do the engineers and chemists.

In the process, we developed a course based on the pollution-prevention methodology, technologies, and practices described in this book, and taught it to over 250 DuPont professionals in the United States and Europe. The course was also given in Poland as part of a World Environment Center initiative, and was taught at the University of Delaware as part of their Environmental Certificate Program and Chemical Engineering Graduate Program. In addition, we helped design and participated in three pollution-prevention workshops—two sponsored by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers’ Center for Waste Reduction Technology and one organized by the Delaware Chamber of Commerce. Lastly, the work was recognized with a DuPont Safety, Health, and Environmental Excellence Award, one of only 13 achievements chosen to receive this award in 1998 by a corporate selection committee comprising DuPont professionals and external representatives from leading environmental organizations.

In summary, this book offers many practical tools and methodologies for establishing and implementing a pollution-prevention program at your site, whether large or small. Our approach combines a proven, well-structured methodology with simplified tools and techniques to speed your journey through the process. If nothing else, we hope that we have dispelled the myth that pollution prevention is process-specific.

*Kenneth L. Mulholland  
James A. Dyer*

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“If you always do  
What you always did,  
You will always get  
What you always got.”

Joe Juran

“It is not the answer that illuminates,  
it is the question.”

Playwright Eugene Ionesco

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