

Energy Asset Solutions, LLC

Best Practices: Getting the Most from Your Scheduled Maintenance Events

By EAS Staff

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Assuming your ethanol facility hasn't gone offline due to a catastrophic failure, there is much to be done in the days ahead of and during a scheduled shutdown event.

Read more below about how EAS helped one facility optimize their shutdown planning & execution to get them back in production & making money and how your plant can learn from their experiences.

As any owner of an ethanol facility surely understands, when margins are positive you want to be producing at full throttle. Of course, in order to do so, your plant has to have routine maintenance to keep it in top condition to take advantage of favorable market conditions. To make sure that your scheduled shutdown / restart goes as planned, it makes sense to call on an experienced crew that can provide the lessons-learned from dozens of similar scenarios.

And that's just what one ethanol plant owner did – they called on EAS to observe & assist with their shutdown planning and execution to assure efficient, effective execution. As a veteran of more start-up's than practically anyone in the ethanol industry, and as a former plant manager himself, [John Haas](#) knows precisely what it takes to execute a perfect shutdown – he also knows that there are likely to be unforeseen events that will need tackling & how to minimize the disruptions around those events.

For this Client, John was charged with reviewing shutdown planning activities, maintenance preparedness & operating data / processes, as well as assisting the plant manager as needed, before, during and immediately after the event. The result was a resounding success, as people & process came together to get the plant back in production according to plan, even after unforeseen maintenance events unfolded.

Regardless of the situation you're in, there are several "people & process" concepts that you can employ prior to, during and after the shutdown to assure that, like this Client's plant, your facility comes back on line as quickly as possible.

- People
 - Make sure you've got the "right people on the bus." You need seasoned veterans with a positive attitude and hands-on approach, all of whom are on the same page and maintain an open mind. As John says, when a plant is down the attitude needs to be "all hands on deck"

- Remain cool under pressure. Nobody can anticipate everything that will happen during a shutdown. Your job as the owner or plant manager is to minimize the disruption that these unforeseen events have on the shutdown and lead your team through to success. Stress begets stress and erodes confidence – people are looking to you for a model of how to behave; make sure they get the right idea.
- Process
 - Be proactive and instill “ownership thinking.” The best way to avoid a catastrophic failure at your facility is to practice routine, methodical, painstakingly-detailed preventive maintenance. Beyond that, a proactive, ownership-oriented culture is a critical success factor for seizing unforeseen opportunities. Especially now, the ability to extract incremental returns is crucial – make being proactive and thinking like an owner part of your human resources “must haves.”
 - Spend time planning the shutdown well in advance and make sure everyone knows what’s expected of them. During the shutdown, continue this coordination and communication to keep things running smoothly and knock-down problems before they become show-stoppers. Make sure to stress that the shutdown affects the entire plant – with minor exceptions, all personnel should be involved in expediting shutdown task completion and getting the plant back up & operating.
 - As part of the pre-shutdown planning efforts, develop a “ Plan B” or “what if scenario.” Remember, nobody can foresee everything in advance. Also, ensure any outside vendors you anticipate using during the shutdown understand the dynamics of the situation they’re likely to face, as well as the scope of work and related issues, *prior* to arrival at site. Nothing is worse than failure of communication that leads to lost hours – time is money!
 - As part of the pre-shutdown activities, do as much to facilitate timely execution of tasks as possible. For instance, have tools staged to ensure that you have what you need before you need it, reducing downtime and stress in advance.
 - As part of the post shutdown activities, make sure you capture lessons learned through after action debriefing and reporting. Whatever worked or didn’t work should be documented, explained and become a component of the next shutdown planning activity. Of not, you’ll be repeating mistakes that are totally avoidable – a cardinal sin of management practice.
 - Develop a relationship with key vendors – like EAS – that can help you plan for the future and execute in the present. This may sound self-serving, but having a trusted partner that knows the industry, as well as your plant & people, can add value in the long term in ways that you might never expect.

If you’re interested in how EAS can add value to your shutdown planning & execution, you can e-mail us at info@energyassetsolutions.com.