

Oh that's not good

Written by Vince

Friday, 01 May 2020 15:41 - Last Updated Friday, 01 May 2020 15:50

I was about to post this story on the [Choking Hazard Podcast](#) in the comment section, but it is so dear to my heart that I figured I would post it on my own web page first, just as proof of originality and ownership. This was posted May 1, 2020, but happened some 25 years earlier.

Pittston, PA. Summer of 1995.

I was working as a contract design engineer at Techneglas. The plant made TV screens—twenty two million screens a year. Almost every TV in the store had a screen made in Pittston.

The plant was massive. Over a third of a mile long, it included three massive furnaces several stories high to melt raw and recycled materials into glass. These only lasted seven years because the bricks were part of the glass formula. Eventually the molten glass would wear through the walls, and before that happened, the furnace needed to be torn down and rebuild. And while you're doing that, you might as well rebuild everything.

In the summer of '95 I was working night shift on the “B” shop rebuild. We were in the tear down mode, and I was point out some equipment to a coworker that had to be removed by morning. In mid sentence I stopped what I was saying, and said “Oh that's not good”

About thirty or so feet in front of us was a control room. As near as I could tell, the Death Star had just exploded in it.

Blue sparks poured from every crevice around the door. All the lighting in “B” and “A” shops went out and were replaced by emergency lights. Smoke followed the sparks.

We ran as fast as we could, and I got to the door first. I remember thinking I was too young to see what I was about to see. I expected carnage...death. But I took deep breath and ripped open the door.

What greeted me was a scene out of a Roadrunner cartoon.

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Two electricians were standing in front of a smoking electrical disconnect. Their shirts were smoking. They were both standing with their jaws dropped. Not moving at all.

I grabbed the closest one by the arm and pulled him out of the smoke. My coworker grabbed the other one. I immediately asked, "What the F*** did you do?"

In retrospect, this was not a particularly sensitive first question. "Are you all right?" would have been better. But their arms were all in the right place, and I was young.

The second electrician explained. The first electrician—the one I had pulled out—had just had an argument with the shop steward, as he was the union rep and they had come to some disagreement.

He was so annoyed at whatever was going on, he opened a three phase, 480 volt electrical disconnect, and proceeded to disconnect one of the legs.

He said the words, "You know I never checked to see if that was..." and before he could say "live" the wire touched the case.

You could see where it touched the case, because the steel was melted.

If that wasn't enough of a hint, there were three black triangles burned into the wall, that looked just like the blaster marks from the first battle in the original star wars.

The lugs in the disconnect had all snapped off from the violence of the electromagnetic cataclysm that had happened in that box.

When we found and woke up the plant night shift electrician (who was totally unmoved by

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the whole thing, except for the fact that we had disturbed his nap) we ended up walking around the plant for I forget how long finding blown breakers. Eventually we had to go to the main transformers, where the 1000 amp lightning arresters were tripped.

The power outage (or power cut , if that is the British way of putting it) shut down three production lines as well as all the power in the area where the rebuild was happening.

But before that, after about 10 minutes after the explosion, the electrician who had forgotten to take the electrical power tester out of his top pocket before unleashing a potentially deadly blast of electricity, finally said something.

“OK...I can see now.”