

Behavioural safety champion Du Pont criticised for fatal accident

The US Chemical Safety Board (CSB) has criticised behavioural safety champion DuPont for safety failings which resulted in the death of a worker at one of its US plants. Carl Fish, 58, died at the company's Belle facility in West Virginia, in January 2010, when he was accidentally sprayed with the deadly chemical phosgene. The CSB said DuPont had used old chemical tubes and relied too much on automated software. DuPont said safety is its core aim.

Mr Fish was sprayed with phosgene when a cable leading from a storage tank frayed. The accident happened a day after two other chemicals were accidentally leaked at the same Dupont facility - methyl chloride and oleum, a type of sulphuric acid. There were no reported injuries in those two cases.

Rafael Moure-Eraso, CSB chairman, said: "We at the Chemical Safety Board were quite surprised and alarmed to learn that DuPont had not one, but three preventable accidents that occurred over a 33-hour period."

Internal DuPont documents released with the CSB draft report indicate that in the 1980's, company officials considered increasing the safety of the area of the plant where phosgene is handled by enclosing the area and venting the enclosure through a scrubber system to destroy any toxic phosgene gas before it entered the atmosphere. However, the documents show the company calculated the benefit ratio of potential lives saved compared to the cost and decided not to make the safety improvements.

Dupont said it had completed its own investigation and was continuing to cooperate with the CSB.

DuPont has been regarded as a safety innovator and leader for many years. It has promoted behavioural safety methods throughout the world, principally through its "STOP" behavioural safety system. Most behavioural safety systems in use today are variants of the STOP Programme.

In the US, the United Steel Workers Union has been critical about DuPont's approach to safety for many years. In 2005 the union published a report illustrating that DuPont's many violations and accidents are not just isolated incidents of worker failure, but establish a clear pattern of denial of corporate responsibility.

In conjunction with the USW, UNITE has also been very critical of behaviour based safety and has warned its members about the potential dangers of behaviour based safety programmes of the type promoted by Du Pont.

For more information see:

CSB News release concerning accidents at DuPont, Belle, West Virginia
<http://www.csb.gov/newsroom/detail.aspx?nid=379>

USW Report on DuPont "Not Walking the Talk: DuPont's Untold Safety Failures,"
<http://odin.pragmatic-solutions.com/drupal/node/135>

Unite behavioural safety campaign
http://www.unitetheunion.org/sectors/graphical_paper_media/beware_behavioural_safety_camp.aspx