



U.S. Chemical Safety Board News Release – November 9, 2006

CSB Considers Final Report on Combustible Dust Hazards at Public Meeting Today

Chairman: “Dust Fires and Explosions are Devastating, Preventable, and Often Fatal Tragedies”

Washington, DC, November 9, 2006 – At a public meeting here today, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) will consider its final report from a two-year investigation of the hazards of combustible dust in industry and is likely to recommend new safety measures for avoiding combustible dust explosions and fires.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. at the Embassy Suites Downtown Washington Hotel, Diplomat/Consulate Room, 1250 22nd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

CSB Chairman Carolyn W. Merritt stated, “Combustible dust fires and explosions are devastating, preventable, and often fatal tragedies. Dust explosions often cause loss of life and terrible economic consequences. While some programs to mitigate dust hazards exist at the state and local levels, they form a patchwork of adapted and adopted voluntary standards that are challenging to enforce. New federal measures are necessary to prevent further loss of life.”

The investigation was initiated in 2004 following explosions the previous year in Kinston, North Carolina (West Pharmaceutical Services), Corbin, Kentucky (CTA Acoustics), and Huntington, Indiana (Hayes-Lemmerz). These accidents, each of which the CSB investigated, resulted in a total of 14 deaths and 81 injuries. Information on the accidents can be found at www.csb.gov.

At the public meeting, the investigation team will present findings and recommendations from the draft report. In June 2005, the Board heard extensive testimony and comment on the issues at a public hearing in Washington, DC.

The explosions, which occur when fine particles of combustible material are ignited, occur in many industries including rubber and plastic products, chemical manufacturing, primary metal, lumber and wood products, and food products, the CSB found. The explosions and fires have occurred nationwide. The CSB identified 281 combustible dust incidents between 1980 and 2005 that killed 119 workers and injured 718, and extensively damaged industrial facilities. Injuries or fatalities occurred in 71 percent of the incidents.

A key finding of the investigation is that there is no U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standard that comprehensively addresses combustible dust explosion hazards in general industry. Although many states and localities have adopted fire codes that

have provisions related to combustible dust, a CSB survey found that fire code officials rarely inspect industrial facilities to enforce the codes. The CSB also reviewed 140 material safety data sheets (MSDSs) for combustible powders and found that in almost half the cases (41%), manufacturers provided no warnings that the powders could explode, and only seven referenced appropriate National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for preventing dust explosions.

The meeting will include a video that provides first-hand accounts from individuals whose lives have been changed by combustible dust fires and explosions. A public comment period is scheduled at the meeting prior to the final Board vote.

The draft report includes a recommendation for OSHA to issue a new national regulatory standard designed to prevent combustible dust fires and explosions in general industry. The report said that existing voluntary consensus codes from the NFPA should form the basis for the new standard. The report specifically pointed to NFPA 654 (*Standard for the Prevention of Fires and Dust Explosions from the Manufacturing, Processing, and Handling of Combustible Particulate Solids – 2006*), NFPA 484 (*Standard for Combustible Metals –2006*), and other standards included in the NFPA’s Uniform Fire Code. Under provisions of the Clean Air Act, OSHA has 180 days to respond to a recommendation from the Board.

The report also calls for OSHA to require expanded dust warnings under its hazard communication standard, to provide training to inspectors on recognizing and preventing combustible dust explosions, and to implement a national Special Emphasis Program on combustible dust hazards in general industry.

Other draft recommendations included calling on the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to modify its standard for hazardous industrial chemicals to urge that material safety data sheets (MSDSs) include combustible dust warnings.

The Board is expected to discuss and vote on the draft report and recommendations at the conclusion of the public meeting.

The CSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents. The agency’s board members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. CSB investigations look into all aspects of chemical accidents, including physical causes such as equipment failure as well as inadequacies in safety management systems. The Board does not issue citations or fines but does make safety recommendations to plants, industry organizations, labor groups, and regulatory agencies such as OSHA and EPA. Further information about the CSB is available from www.csb.gov.

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