

Foundation Foods First Media Event, Gainesville, GA, 30 January 2021

Good Afternoon. I'm Dr. Katherine Lemos, Chairman and CEO of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board – the CSB.

With me is Ben Schrader, the CSB Investigator in Charge, or IIC.

On the other side of him is Ryan Bare, a CSB Investigations Supervisor.

Investigators from the CSB arrived in Gainesville on Thursday evening to begin the on-scene portion of our investigation into the **liquid nitrogen release** at the Foundation Food Group, which occurred Thursday morning.

According to the Public Information Officer for the Fire Department, this incident resulted in **six** fatalities, **twelve** hospitalized and **130** evacuees.

The remainder of the CSB team arrived yesterday including myself.

Before going further, on behalf of the CSB, I extend our deepest condolences to the **families, extended families, and friends** of the victims of this tragic accident.

Primero que todo, quiero expresar mi mas profundo pésame

a las familias y amigos de las personas

que perdieron a sus seres queridos

en esta tragedia.

I can't imagine the loss you're feeling today. The reason we are here is to prevent this from happening again.

The CSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating inadvertent chemical releases at fixed facilities throughout the U.S.

These releases have significant impact on the safety of humans and the environment.

We determine the probable cause of the events, and issue safety recommendations for the purpose of preventing future accidents.

Safety is our priority.

Mr. Schrader is an experienced senior investigator, and is leading a team of multi-disciplinary experts in

- Chemical and Mechanical Engineering,
- and Safety Management Systems

Since arriving, the team has been collecting information:

- interviewed key staff with first-hand knowledge of the event,
- interfaced with local emergency management, and
- other agencies and jurisdictions on-site

Here is what we know thus far, and can share with you:

- At approximately 1015 on Thursday morning, January 28, multiple 911 emergency calls were made to report an incident at Foundation Food Group's Prepared Foods Division, Plant 4, here in Gainesville, GA.
- Emergency responders identified the event as a HAZMAT situation.
- The responding agencies included
 - Hall County Fire Service
 - Hall County Sherriff's Office
 - Gainesville Fire Department
 - Gainesville Police Department
- You are already aware of the emergency response and evacuation of other employees, so I'll move on to other elements.
- The County Sherriff, Gerald Couch, confirmed that five employees died at the scene, and others were transported to Northeast Georgia Medical Center.
- One of those employees later succumbed to their injuries at the hospital.
- Hall County Fire Services notified the media that there was no explosion.

Here are the facts we've learned about the events leading to the 911 calls:

- As you may know, this facility processes poultry.
- In Plant 4, there are 5 production lines, and the event occurred on Line 4.
- On Line 4, chicken is processed, to include seasoning, cooking, and then flash freezing.
- LN is used to flash freeze the chicken.
- There was a release of liquid nitrogen, which rapidly converted to a gas.
- This gas is heavier than air, and forces oxygen out of the room.
- In the facility, a cryogenic freezer and associated equipment houses and disperses the LN
- The LN is stored in tanks external to the building, in the parking lot.
- In a description of the incident with CSB investigators, the maintenance manager described personally closing the isolation valves of the tanks in the parking lot, shutting off supply to the building.
- We are currently working to understand the exact location of the point of release inside the plant.
- Just this morning, company officials have cleared the site as safe for CSB investigators to enter, and they've been onsite all day.
- We have learned that Plant 4 receives 2-3 18-wheel truckloads per day of LN.
- We have also learned Messer supplied the external supply tanks, and we're still looking into who manufactured the interior equipment.
- We do know that major portions of the LN system, interior and exterior, were installed and commissioned in the last 4-6 weeks.
- We have reports that tools were located on the ground around the equipment.

We will be working diligently to determine more information regarding the installation, age, operation, phase of operation, maintenance and condition of the equipment.

Our team under Ben's leadership will continue their on-scene part of the investigation over the coming days, conducting interviews and reviewing materials and documentation.

Our investigations examine and evaluate a wide range of aspects, to include:

- equipment and system design
- regulations, industry standards and guidance
- training, operations and procedures; and
- human and organizational factors.

We are jointly conducting the investigation with OSHA Region 4 out of the Atlanta office.

Others involved in the investigation include:

- Hall County Fire Services (Fire Marshall's Office)
- Hall County Sherriff's Office
- U.S.D.A Food Safety Inspection Service

The purpose of our investigation is to understand **what** happened, **what led** to the event and **why** it occurred, so that we can recommend changes to prevent future occurrences.

We will not determine the PC during this on-scene portion of our investigation, nor will we speculate about what may have caused this accident.

Depending on the complexity of the investigation, it may take up to several years.

As this is the start of the investigation, we understand that you'll want more information than we have provided today.

We will keep you informed as new information is collected.

We'll be posting updates on our website at www.csb.gov, and www.twitter.com/chemsafetyboard

On behalf of the CSB, I would like to thank the first responders to this tragic incident, as well as the supporting local investigative resources mentioned earlier.

We truly appreciate all that they have done.

END STATEMENT