



U. S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

RECOMMENDATIONS STATUS CHANGE

SUMMARY

Report:	West Fertilizer Fire and Explosion
Recommendation Numbers:	2013-2-I-TX-R9 2013-2-I-TX-R10
Date Issued:	January 28, 2016
Recipient:	Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
New Status:	R9: Open Acceptable Response or Alternate Response R10: Open Acceptable Response or Alternate Response
Date of Status Change:	January 11, 2017

Recommendation(s) Text:

CSB Recommendation No. 2013-02-I-TX-R9:

Assist training partners to develop and provide continual oversight for an FGAN training program. In addition, evaluate the training curriculum to confirm that it adequately meets course objectives as well as the details of recommendation 2013-02-I-TX R8.

CSB Recommendation No. 2013-02-I-TX-R10:

Develop an outreach program that notifies regional, state, and local fire departments about available FGAN training opportunities. The program should include the following:

- a. Guidance for fire departments on how to identify FGAN hazards within their communities by engaging State Emergency Response Commissions and Local Emergency Planning Committees*
- b. Details on how to obtain FGAN training by submitting a proposal in response to the funding opportunity*
- c. Information on training partners and programs that provide FGAN training.*

Board Status Change Decision:

A. Rationale for Recommendation

On April 17, 2013, an explosion and fire occurred at the West Fertilizer Company (WFC), a fertilizer blending, retail, and distribution facility in West, Texas. The violent detonation of fertilizer grade ammonium nitrate (FGAN) fatally injured 12 emergency responders and three members of the public. Local hospitals treated more than 260 injured victims, many of whom required hospital admission. The blast completely destroyed the WFC facility and caused widespread damage to more than 150 offsite buildings.

As a part of its investigation, the CSB found that curriculum manuals used for hazardous materials (HAZMAT) training and certification of firefighters placed little emphasis on responding to storage sites containing FGAN. This is true for both the federal and Texas HAZMAT training and certification programs. In addition, lessons learned from previous FGAN-related fires were not shared with other fire departments, including the West Volunteer Fire Department. If previous lessons learned had been applied at West, the firefighters and emergency response personnel who responded to the incident might have better understood the risks associated with FGAN-related fire and acted accordingly.

While many federal and state grants support the needs of firefighters and fire departments, these grants often focus more on resources, such as personal protection equipment or firefighting equipment, rather

than training. As a result, the CSB made recommendations to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This status change summary addresses Recommendations No. 2013-02-I-TX-R9 and 2013-02-I-TX-R10 related to awarding funds associated with FGAN hazards awareness training.

B. Response to the Recommendations

On September 16, 2016, FEMA awarded two grants of a million dollars each to the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) and the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) to develop and deliver HAZMAT training, focusing on FGAN hazards.

Regarding **Recommendations No. 2013-02-I-TX-R9**, FEMA stated that FEMA “maintains substantial involvement with all non-federal entities in carrying out the activities contemplated by CTG awards.” In addition, FEMA uses an evaluation model to ensure all aspects of the grant are met, and has dedicated FEMA program managers who monitor the status of the grant throughout the life cycle of the award.

Regarding **Recommendations No. 2013-02-I-TX-R10**, FEMA stated that it conducts outreach efforts through a variety of mechanisms, including its intergovernmental partnerships, technical assistance programs and other community engagement activities. FEMA stated that it provides outreach to numerous organizations including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Governors Association, International Association of Emergency Managers, and others. In addition, FEMA maintains a website called www.firstrespondertraining.gov which contains information on all available courses. FEMA plans to use these mechanisms to advertise the FGAN course, when developed.

C. Board Analysis and Decision

As FEMA has committed to implementing R9 and R10 and has demonstrated that they already have the mechanisms in place to carry out these actions, CSB designated **Recommendations Nos. 2013-02-I-TX-R9 and R10** as “**Open – Acceptable Response or Alternate Response.**”