

Safety Design, Shutdown Shortcomings, Played Role in Chemical Release



(KAIR)--Kansas City served as the site Wednesday for a press conference, held to reveal the preliminary findings of the ongoing investigation into October's chemical release at Atchison based MGP Ingredients.

The investigation is being conducted by the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board. Lucy Tyler is serving as Investigator in Charge. "At about 7:35 a.m., a Harcros truck containing sulfuric acid arrived at the MGPI processing plant," Tyler said. "The MGPI operator also unlocked the sulfuric acid line. The CSB found that the MGPI operator likely did not notice that the sodium hypochlorite cam leather coupling on the fill line was already unlocked before returning to the operation facility which allowed the Harcros delivery driver to make the wrong connection. As a result of the incorrect connection, 4,000 gallons of sulfuric acid from the truck was discharged into the nearly full tank of sodium hypochlorite."

Tyler outlined the findings so far as related to the chemical release on the morning of October 21. "In its' investigation, the CSB has identified a number of deficiencies related to the design and operation of transfer equipment used during chemical deliveries at MGPI," Tyler said. "The investigation team has reviewed similar incidents at other facilities that involved the inadvertent mixing of chemicals. Some of those incidents resulted in more serious consequences such as worker fatality. The CSB found that there are actions that facilities and motor carriers can immediately take to prevent similar types of incidents from happening in the future."

Tyler said the investigative team has identified 6 preliminary key findings regarding remediation of future such occurrences. "Facilities should ensure

labeling of transfer equipment is clear and accurately represents the material contained within that equipment,” Tyler said. “The label for the sulfuric acid line was found detached from its piping after the incident and the piping was mislabeled hydrochloric acid from a prior service. The sodium hypochlorite fill line was loosely attached to its piping and the text was upside down. The labels designating sulfuric acid and sodium hypochlorite were not placed near their connection points. The sulfuric acid fill line and the sodium hypochlorite fill line were located only 18 inches apart. Neither MPCI nor Harcros followed internal chemical unloading procedures at the time of the incident. MPCI had no way to stop the truck from continuing to empty its contents into the incorrect tank because the facilities did not have an emergency shut down mechanism that could be actuated from a remote location. Chlorine gas quickly filled the control room and operators were unable to safely mitigate the release by manually closing the sodium hypochlorite valve located outside of the line. Lastly, emergency shut off valves and trucks should be activated when necessary. Driver should be fully trained on the use of such equipment.”

The CSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents. It is not a regulatory agency, and does not have the authority to levy fines or other penalties. However, the agency makes recommendations based on the findings of its investigations.

Those recommendations, related to the MGP chemical release, are expected to be revealed this fall.

The accident sent 140 persons to area hospitals for treatment that Friday morning.

Two were admitted for long term care.

Following the conclusion of the press conference, MGP released the following statement:

Since the incident on October 21, 2016 at our specialty wheat protein and starch facility in Atchison, Kansas, MPCI Processing, Inc. has cooperated fully with federal, state and local agencies in their ongoing investigations. In addition, we are currently making every effort to enhance our operations so this type of situation does not happen again. As part of this effort, we hired Burns & McDonnell to provide a comprehensive review of our loading, unloading, and chemical storage methods to strengthen the safety of our systems.

Over the past six months, we have worked closely with

members of the community who sought medical attention following the incident to cover costs associated with treatment. We have paid for the medical treatment and related expenses, including ambulance services and radiology and pharmacy bills of 134 individuals who sought care at area providers, including Atchison Hospital, Holton Community Hospital, Lawrence Memorial Hospital, Hiawatha Community Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, Mosaic Life Care in St. Joseph, and others.

We are thankful for the emergency responders, including the Atchison Fire and Police Departments, City and County officials, and the Kansas Highway Patrol, as well as the EPA and OSHA, who came together with us to quickly and effectively respond to the situation and keep our community safe. We are grateful to Atchison Hospital and the many other medical service providers who provided care to those impacted. Since the event, we have worked proactively with City and County first responders to assess our collective response and further augment emergency response planning.

MGP appreciates the important work that the Chemical Safety Board (CSB) performs to assist in the prevention of incidents. The company understands that CSB's findings are preliminary and could be subject to change as further information is forthcoming.

MGP is proud of our history in Atchison and the strong partnership we have with the City. We are committed to being a good corporate citizen and to doing what is right by the members of our community.

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