

Yet Another Hot Work Accident in Colorado-CSB chief expresses regret

Dr. Rafael Moure-Eraso, chairperson and CEO of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) said today he was saddened by news of the death of a Colorado welder yesterday while performing what is called “hot work” on a storage tank containing flammables at an environmental remediation company in Englewood, Colorado.

Hot work is defined as welding, cutting, grinding, or other spark-producing activities that can ignite flammable substances. To date in 2010, the CSB has learned of 15 serious hot work-related fires and explosions that caused six reported fatalities and numerous injuries.

Dr. Moure said, “I am saddened by this accident and disturbed that such fatalities continue to occur. The CSB is vitally concerned about hot work accidents and this was expressed in our important safety bulletin and safety video, both issued within the past few months.”

According to information gathered by the CSB from the fire department and the company, a worker was standing on a ladder, welding on the side of a tank partially filled with a mixture of water and flammable hydrocarbons. Sparks ignited flammable vapor and the worker was thrown off the ladder, suffering fatal injuries. **The company stated that although it has a hot work permit system and had provided safety training to the victim, there was no monitoring for a flammable atmosphere before or during the welding. (What a joke-how can anybody issue a permit when they haven't measured the flammable gas concentration in the area-do they expect a piece of paper will actually prevent an accident).** While current OSHA standards prohibit hot work in an explosive atmosphere, OSHA does not explicitly require the use of combustible gas detectors.

There have been more than 60 fatalities since 1990 due to explosions and fires from hot work activities on tanks. In seven of the 11 accidents discussed in the bulletin, no gas testing was performed prior to or during the hot work activities. In the remaining cases, monitoring was conducted improperly.

Dr. Moure said, “There is no secret to preventing these accidents. Companies should require effective monitoring of the atmosphere before and during all welding or other

spark-producing activities near tanks that may contain flammable liquids or gases. Monitoring should be frequent or continuous and performed at multiple locations to assure that no flammable vapor is present which could be ignited. Monitoring the atmosphere and following the other six key lessons in our bulletin can help avoid these tragedies.”