

BLOG: Plant safety – Is it taking a backseat to economic pressures?

Producing chemicals will never be without risks and accidents in plants can always happen, as has been shown in recent years when chemical accidents have occurred in the US, Spain, China and elsewhere.

Politicians always pay attention to accident prevention right after a major accident has taken place. Regulations and enforcement are then sharpened up, but when then for some time no major accident has occurred, the priority for prevention goes down. Furthermore, when there are economically bad times, shortcuts with prevention procedures are more likely to happen than in more prosperous times, as was seen in the BP Deepwater oil spill accident. Also, multinational companies do not always take regulations equally serious in all countries. For example when enforcement is less optimal, like in certain developing and emerging economies, plant management might have a different focus on accident prevention than in countries with a more strict enforcement regime.

In Helsinki Chemicals Forum the aspect of responsibility of senior corporate leaders in relation to safety of plants will be a focus for the panel of Plant Safety. Five experts with differing backgrounds will provide key information on where policies related to chemical accident prevention stand across the world in governments and in industry, and they will give their points of view on the developments over the last few years which saw an economic downturn.

Alexandros Kiriazis from the European Commission will describe the state of play in the European Union reflected in the Sevezo Directive. **Kenan Stevick** from the Dow Chemical Corporation in the US will outline the situation in the US and give insights from the side of industry, especially about the way chemical accident prevention is taken into account by senior management in a multinational chemical company. **Peter Kearns** from the OECD will talk about the recent work of his organization in this field and in particular about the document on "Corporate Governance for Process Safety - Guidance for Senior Leaders in High Hazard Industries". **Elisa Tonda** from the UN Environment Programme will present its longstanding work on Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the Local Level and highlight other relevant global activities of this programme. **Christian Schaible** will, on behalf of the European Environmental Bureau, give the views of workers and civil society and indicate where progress on accident prevention can still be considered.

Based on this rich information base and the views brought forward from different perspectives, an interesting discussion among the panel members and with the audience can be expected. In such a discussion practical safety management aspects can come up, but certainly also the political dimension will get ample attention. So, all ingredients for an instructive and exciting 120 minutes on Plant Safety have been brought together.



Rob Visser
Moderator
Member of the Helsinki Chemicals Forum Programme Committee

The Panel about Plant Safety will take place on Friday 27th May 2016 in Helsinki Chemicals Forum. You are also welcome to join the conversation on Twitter [@ChemicalsForum](https://twitter.com/ChemicalsForum).