

In response to the following press release, AcuSafe.com has withdrawn the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) 600K Report from its web site. (1/4/01)

CSB Restructures Accident Data Program, Withdraws '600K' Study

Washington, DC – December 22, 2000 – The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) has approved measures to refocus and improve its chemical accident data program, in keeping with the Board's recent five-year Strategic Plan.

That Plan noted, "There is no accepted measure of the frequency of chemical accidents that are within the purview of the CSB." Better accident data will be helpful in targeting future prevention efforts, according to Board officials. The CSB will now focus attention on its five-year strategic goal to establish a "system for chemical accident data collection and analysis."

Earlier Accident Data Study Withdrawn

Board Members voted unanimously to withdraw the agency's 1999 preliminary accident data study, which was entitled The 600K Report: Commercial Chemical Incidents in the United States 1987-1996. The "600K" of the title referred to a calculated total of 600,000 chemical incidents reported to the federal government between 1987 and 1996.

The then-Chairman of the CSB submitted The 600K Report as part of written testimony to a House of Representatives panel in February 1999. However, The 600K Report had never been voted on by the full Board, whose Members must approve all CSB reports.

The Board also said today it was suspending work on a final accident "baseline" report, which relied on the same composite database as The 600K Report.

Flaws in Integrated Database Cited

Internal staff review found serious flaws in the composite database that was developed by CSB staff and formed the basis of The 600K Report. For example, the database contained casualty data for transportation accidents where the presence of hazardous materials was only coincidental. At the same time, information on known serious chemical accidents – like a series of fatal refinery blasts in the late 1980s and early '90s – was absent from the report or incomplete, according to the staff review.

Commenting on the withdrawal, Board Member Irv Rosenthal said, "The 600K Report was an ambitious attempt to get a complete snapshot of chemical accidents nationwide. Unfortunately, the five existing federal accident databases that formed the basis of the report were not designed

with this purpose in mind. These federal databases were created to serve specific statutory purposes, such as the initiation of emergency response activities. The failure of the ‘600K’ data integration project only underscores the importance of a concerted effort to get high-quality accident data.”

The composite database was assembled in 1999 by compiling ten-year records from five government sources: the National Response Center’s Incident Reporting Information System (IRIS), EPA’s Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS), OSHA’s Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), the Department of Transportation’s Hazardous Material Incident Reporting System (HMIRS), and the U.S. Fire Administration’s National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). Preliminary screening was done in an effort to eliminate non-chemical events and duplicate records.

Better-Quality Data Needed

According to Board Member Rosenthal, “One conclusion of The 600K Report – that chemical accidents occur too often and cause unnecessary deaths, injuries, and disruption – is surely true. The EPA Risk Management Program’s five-year accident data, which only cover a limited sphere of industries, show there are hundreds of casualties each year from fixed-facility chemical accidents. Without a better yardstick, however, it will prove difficult to direct resources to the areas of greatest need or measure progress in accident prevention. To improve safety systems we need comprehensive, industry- and chemical-specific accident statistics.”

Laying out the Board’s future direction, Rosenthal said, “Over the coming months, we will be working closely with stakeholders and tapping our best expertise internally to arrive at meaningful accident data goals. Other federal agencies also have an important role to play, and we look forward to cooperating with them. We need to develop readily accessible, high-quality accident data without placing unnecessary or duplicative reporting requirements on industry. Ideally, data quality can improve while reporting mechanisms actually get simpler.” In the interim, the CSB will include a new accident data directory page on the Board’s website, www.chemsafety.gov. In 2001, CSB will convene a stakeholder roundtable to discuss proposals for improving chemical accident data. The CSB is an independent federal agency whose mission is to ensure the safety of workers and the public by preventing chemical incidents. The CSB is a scientific investigatory organization, not an enforcement or regulatory body. The Board determines the root causes of accidents, issues safety recommendations, and performs special studies on chemical safety issues.