Refinery Events Will Be More Difficult to Track

The public could easily track refinery events for many years using the Energy Assurance Daily (EAD) web page on the Department of Energy (DOE) website. I did so these past 10 years to track such refinery events as fires, releases and other operational incidents. It helped illustrate the lack of attention the oil industry paid to process safety, and the repeat accidents proved that the oil companies failed to learn from previous incidents.

DOE has new priorities, and one of them is the elimination of easily accessible information about refinery events. The site’s final post appeared on June 9 with this notice:

“The Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability’s (OE) Infrastructure Security and Energy Restoration (ISER) Division has discontinued publication of the Energy Assurance Daily (EAD). Previously, the EAD provided a summary of publicly-reported energy sector events. Given the ease with which the public can search online for information and the availability of free customizable news alerts, the EAD is now duplicative and the utilization of the EAD has diminished.

“Given the decreased utilization of the EAD, OE determined that resources could be more effectively directed to other activities. ISER will continue to provide publicly-available situation reports on the OE website during major events affecting the energy sector and will continue to ensure that Federal and state partners are alerted to pertinent information. Federal partners and State Energy Emergency Assurance Coordinators are also encouraged to register for EAGLE-I, which provides situational awareness about the nation’s energy infrastructure, by visiting https://eagle-i.doe.gov.”

If you have searched the internet for events in the refining sector you know it can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. They are not collected in one location like they were on the EAD page.

This will severely limit our ability to identify trends in the oil sector as well as follow a company’s incident history. Discontinuing this page is a disservice to workers and the public in general. The information available here will be sorely missed. We will have to rely on locally collected information and it has been hard to gather.

In conjunction with our legislative office in Washington, DC, we continue to work on issues that are important to our industry and critically impact our jobs, such as the point of obligation for the Renewable Fuel Standard, pipeline reversal in Pennsylvania and the percentage of ethanol blended into gasoline and diesel. I appreciate the quick responses and willingness to participate when you have been called to support an action. These are ongoing issues and will require our vigilance to assure we have positive outcomes.

On a sad note, we had a contractor fatality at our Motiva Port Arthur, Texas, refinery. An IBEW member was fatally injured on Thursday, July 13 and an investigation is ongoing to learn the circumstances and prevent this from happening in the future. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and coworkers.

Kim Nibarger
NOBP Chair
knibarger@usw.org
(Office) 412-562-2403

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It’s important to get this newsletter into the hands of all of our oil members. Please copy The OilWorker and hand it out to your fellow members during non-work times (breaks, lunch, before and after work) in non-work areas (breakrooms, lunchrooms, plant gates, entrances into the plant). Also, if you have the home email addresses of your members, please email The OilWorker to them. In addition, please post The OilWorker to your own and your local’s Facebook and web pages and to the union bulletin boards in the plant. Thank you for all your support and help!

Lynne Hancock, The OilWorker editor, lhancock@usw.org
ExxonMobil Shareholder Support Builds for USW Lobbying Proposal

A USW resolution that ExxonMobil disclose its corporate lobbying expenditures is gaining more support from the company’s shareholders.

At ExxonMobil’s May 31 annual meeting in Dallas, the USW and 13 other pre-eminent co-filers garnered 28 percent of the shareholder vote for the proposal—the highest ever in five years of submissions.

The resolution calls on ExxonMobil to prepare a report—updated annually—disclosing four items:

1) The company’s policies and procedures governing lobbying, both direct and indirect, and grassroots lobbying communications;
2) The company’s payments for direct and indirect lobbying, or grassroots lobbying communications, including amounts and recipients;
3) Disclosure of ExxonMobil’s membership in and payments to tax-exempt organizations that write and endorse model legislation; and
4) The management’s and Board’s decision-making process and oversight for making such lobbying payments.

“USW has filed this resolution for several years because we view our members as long-term stakeholders in the company’s success,” said Kim Nibarger, head of the National Oil Bargaining Program. “Nationwide, corporate disclosure of direct and indirect lobbying payments has been rapidly improving. USW even withdrew a similar shareholder proposal at Tesoro this year because the company exceeded the resolution’s standards.

“But, ExxonMobil continues to fall short of meeting the needs of its shareholders on this important issue of corporate transparency and accountability,” Nibarger added.

The company increased the content on its website regarding important policy issues, including the board of directors’ review process. It also published a report that lists charitable donations to groups including the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)—an organization that writes conservative legislation at the state level.

“This is a limited step,” said USW ExxonMobil Council President Ricky Brooks. “Even though the company makes the basic lobbying disclosures required by law, it does not reveal critical information about payments made to trade associations that lobby elected officials and contribute money to state and federal election campaigns.

“This is critical information, especially when the lobbying concerns regulations that impact worker health and safety,” Brooks added.

Local 13-750’s Triangle of Prevention Program Impacts Hydraulic Industry

When Local 13-750’s Triangle of Prevention (TOP) program investigators at the former Motiva (now Shell) refinery in Convent, La., started an in-depth analysis of how a contractor got severely injured, they did not expect to make a permanent impact on the hydraulic industry.

They discovered the root cause of the contractor’s injury was a hydraulic tensioner and recommended a design and engineering change to the device so that others would not get injured as well.

The tension manufacturer learned of the TOP team’s findings and invited the investigators to present their conclusions and recommendations, and to be involved in a system redesign. Both parties designed, built and tested a new safety device to create an improved system.

The manufacturer pulled all of its tensioner units out of service until they could be retrofitted to the newly designed safety device. This design change will impact the hydraulic industry and make these devices safer.

Local 13-750’s contribution toward safety improvement resulted in the union receiving the 2016 Glenn Erwin Award. This award is given to TOP sites for completing an investigation that resulted in a significant improvement using the Design and Engineering System of Safety principle to eliminate a known hazard and make a process or task safer.

USW retiree Glenn Erwin was instrumental in designing the TOP program and became its program director in 1994. The U.S. Chemical Safety Board chose Erwin to be the union representative on the Baker Panel, which investigated the March 2005 explosion at the former BP refinery in Texas City. (Marathon Petroleum now owns the refinery, and calls it the Galveston Bay refinery.)

Erwin retired from the Tony Mazzocchi Center in 2011.

(L-R): Darrell Heltz, Local 13-750 unit chair; Glenn Erwin, and Marty Poche, Local 13-750 president, display the local’s Glenn Erwin Award.
USW’s Triangle of Prevention (TOP) program to address health and safety proactively by investigating near misses, incidents and process upsets is a tool to get members actively involved with their union, build solidarity and create better labor relations with management.

Amalgamated Local 13-423’s unit at Motiva’s Port Arthur, Texas, refinery successfully works the TOP program to create a safer work environment and get members involved in their union.

After USW’s 2015 National Oil Bargaining unfair labor practice strike ended at the refinery, the facility underwent a major plant shutdown and overhaul, known as a turnaround, beginning in early January through March 2016. This is a major undertaking, especially since the refinery is the largest in North America with a capacity of 600,000 barrels a day.

Workers reported an increasing number of incidents to the unit’s TOP program, so the USW leadership recommended meeting this challenge by creating a TOP Turnaround Investigation Rapid Response Team.

“There was definitely an uptick in reporting once the team was created,” said Jeff Wright, Local 13-423 Motiva PAR Group TOP representative.

“Every day we use hand tools to loosen bolts and do other jobs. The odds of dropping a wrench and killing someone is low, but people drop a hand tool all the time,” Wright said.

“There is a proper way to handle tools. After a number of tool-dropping incidents, management finally made a ‘tool lanyard’ available for workers if needed. (A ‘tool lanyard’ is a harness for workers to wear and put their tools in).

“With more awareness, the less likely an incident is going to happen. It’s where we do things all the time where we have incidents,” he added.

Wright said there was also a number of higher risk incidents reported.

Engaging Workers

The local began training hourly employees as TOP/Causal Learning Investigation Facilitators in a two-week program.

Wright, a TOP representative, and/or employees who have taken the train the trainer class teach the hourly workers the elements of an investigation. If there is a reported incident during the training, the students investigate it with the help of TOP personnel.

Participation is on a volunteer basis, and a worker can remain an investigation facilitator for as long as they like. Once a year they are given, at a minimum, a four-hour TOP refresher course.

Besides staffing the TOP Turnaround Investigation Rapid Response Team, the investigation facilitators are called upon on an as-needed basis during regular operations. If needed, they are pulled away from their normal job duties until the investigation is completed.

Currently, the local has trained 52 investigation facilitators and would like to have 10 percent of the 800 USW and IBEW members trained.

The USW leadership is also engaging the company in establishing a full-time Near Miss Coordinator role.

Large Number of Incidents Reported

During the January-March 2016 turnaround, the TOP Rapid Response team investigated 65 incidents, Wright said. Many reports concerned low-risk, high-frequency incidents, such as the dropping of hand tools.

“Every day we use hand tools to loosen bolts and do other jobs. The odds of dropping a wrench and killing someone is low, but people drop a hand tool all the time,” Wright said.

“There is a proper way to handle tools. After a number of tool-dropping incidents, management finally made a “tool lanyard” available for workers if needed. (A “tool lanyard” is a harness for workers to wear and put their tools in).

“The higher the awareness, the less likely an incident is going to happen. It’s where we do things all the time where we have incidents,” he added.

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Employee-Driven TOP Program Improves Refinery Safety

(continued from page 3)

As the TOP Rapid Response team began investigating all the incidents and reporting the lessons learned, he said the number of repeat incidents rapidly declined.

“I think the TOP Rapid Response Team is responsible for a piece of our success. I think we increased awareness about hazards and understanding about the lessons learned,” Wright said.

What Team Discovered

Based on the incidents reported during the January—March 2016 turnaround, the investigation team discovered health and safety gaps at the site, and created an improvement plan using a map of the incidents and recommendations to solve them.

“Looking at the lessons learned as a whole, we were able to identify multiple elements of work processes that needed improvement,” Wright said.

This included improving elements of the permit-to-work process; how employees can work better together; work execution, such as bringing in the correct raw material to do a job and not dropping tools, etc.; and overall training in general.

Union Positively Impacts Workplace

Management was so impressed with Local 13-423 members’ participation in the TOP turnaround program and the positive impact it had on safety that it nominated the local for the 2016 TOP Fallen Workers Memorial Award.

The Fallen Workers Memorial Award is given to local unions for building solidarity and exhibiting collective involvement within the TOP program. The local receiving the award has successfully secured management’s acceptance of TOP, ensuring the TOP representative’s ability to perform investigations and conduct TOP steering meetings. Local union leadership also had to successfully promote TOP through communication with the membership and management so both worked to solidify health and safety goals.

“I am very impressed with how Local 13-423’s Motiva unit involved workers in the TOP program and engaged them in devising solutions to their site’s health and safety problems,” said Kim Nibarger, head of the USW’s National Oil Bargaining Program.

“The local’s actions exemplify the strength of an employee-driven health and safety program like TOP. In the late 1990s, this Port Arthur site was a TOP pilot program, and Shell-Motiva management signed a letter of agreement with the union to be involved in the program,” Nibarger said.

Wright will be at the TOP 2017 conference on Sept. 26-29 in Philadelphia, Pa., and he invites all TOP locals attending to speak with him about his local’s turnaround and investigation facilitator programs.

Triangle of Prevention Conference Slated for September

The 2017 TOP conference will be held on Sept. 26-29, 2017 in Philadelphia, Pa., for TOP representatives, TOP alternate representatives, local union leadership, unit chairs, health and safety chairs, and their management colleagues.

For the original call letter, go to the USW Tony Maz-locchi Center web page, http://www.uswtmc.org/resources/top-conference

USW Local Union 10-1 will be hosting the conference at its union hall, 26 West Winona Avenue, Norwood, PA 19074.

A block of rooms are reserved at the Sheraton Suites-Philadelphia Airport for $139 per night. A hotel reservation can be made by calling 800-325-3535 and referencing the USW TOP Conference or by going to the web page link above.

The cut-off date for booking a hotel room is Sept. 4, 2017. Check-in is on Monday, Sept. 25 and check-out is Friday, Sept. 29. If flying, you will fly in and out of Philadelphia International Airport.

The labor/management days of the conference are Tuesday, Sept. 26 and Wednesday, Sept. 27. There will be trainings and discussions related to the function of the TOP program. Presentation of the Glenn Erwin and Fallen Workers’ Memorial Awards will be held on Tuesday afternoon. A union-only day will be Thursday, Sept. 28 with the election of members to the TOP Advisory Group.

To register for the conference, please contact Linda Cook at lcook@uswtmc.org. Provide Linda with a list of the attendees’ names and titles, including management participants.

Nominations for TOP Awards

Do you know of a TOP site and local union whose achievements revealing significant health and safety improvements and/or collective involvement within the program are worthy of recognition?

If so, go to http://www.uswtmc.org/resources/top-conference and nominate them for a TOP award.

All nominations are due by Friday, Aug. 4, 2017.