

STANDING STRONG at SOLVAY

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Solvay Locals: What are your Safety and Health Priorities?

What are the safety problems at your plant that your members would like fixed? What kind of safety and health training does your local need?

These are the kinds of questions Ashlee Fitch from the USW Health, Safety and Environment Department would like answered so she can provide locals with the type of training they need.

Fitch developed a health and safety survey for Solvay locals. It is the first time such a survey has been given to the Solvay groups.

“You can’t identify strategies and have effective training sessions if you do not have a grasp on what the issues are,” Fitch said. “We need to know the problems first before we can change them. That’s why we need to identify the council’s safety and health needs.

“For me, whenever the council meets, that’s precious time to do training and determine strategy to resolve health and safety issues,” she added.

Fitch noticed that during the Solvay plant tours and council and local meetings the health and safety issues at each location were similar, but varied slightly. Some locals had health and safety committees, while others lacked them.

“The role and responsibility of each safety committee member is different at each site, which is not bad, but we need to get on the same page about how we are operating,” she said.

The survey also asks locals to describe their health and safety contract language.

“This will help the locals during bargaining,” she said.

“When the company says, ‘We don’t have that health and safety language in our contracts,’ the local can respond, ‘Yes, you do. You have it at site XYZ.’”

Fitch said she is reviewing alternative ways to collect this necessary information from the Solvay locals so that health and safety priorities can be set. If any local has not completed its survey or needs another copy, please contact Ashlee Fitch at afitch@usw.org.



USW UNITED STEELWORKERS

University Park Finishes Phase One of Exhaust/Ventilation Installation

Solvay workers can breathe freely at the company's University Park, Ill., plant now that management has completed phase one of the exhaust and ventilation system.

The reactor room and inside flammable tank farm area now have an intake system to draw in air from the outside and exhaust fans to pull the indoor air to the outside environment. The plant makes chemical bases, like sulfates and sodium chloride, for personal care products.

Local 2011 President Michael Spicknall said the intake fans are on a variable drive so that operators can adjust them to bring in more air from the outside. He said the exhaust fans are in different zones to enable adequate airflow in all areas.

"The reactor room and tank farm area have air turnover now, and the system is above the industry standard," Spicknall said.

He said the second phase, if needed, will be to install

a heating system in the ductwork. Engineers are waiting for plant management to determine what the temperature should be inside the reactor room and tank farm.

"You can tell a difference in these areas," Spicknall said. "The air used to be stale and hot. You had a fan blowing on you, but it was blowing hot, stale air. I think we'll notice a difference on hot, sunny days."

Previously, the local said that employees developed asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease allegedly because of the lack of a ventilation and exhaust system in the reactor room and tank farm. The company sampled the air and the local contacted OSHA. The agency toured the plant and advised how to remedy the fumes.

Spicknall credited the council for ensuring management followed through on the installation.

"If we didn't have this Solvay council, we would just be a few people, like little fish in a big sea," he said.

USW Teaches Hazard Mapping at University Park Site



An example of a small group health and safety activity like the one done at University Park's safety day. Photo credit: Mike Hancock, LU 9-562 retiree

Workers and management at Solvay's University Park, Ill., plant are more aware of potential health and safety problems since they received USW training on hazard mapping last October during the facility's annual safety day.

USW staffer Ashlee Fitch from the Health, Safety & Environment Department and Jeff Hill, North American representative on the Solvay Global Forum, taught the hazard mapping classes over a two-day period. Solvay broke the workforce into groups so that

everyone, including management, could attend one of the sessions.

Hill said that he and Fitch divided the class into groups of three to four people and gave them poster board paper and markers. Each group selected a work area they were familiar with, drew the area on paper and identified with different colored markers where the hazards were located.

"This class got people talking, saying things like, 'Hey, I didn't realize what was in this tank.' It created a lot of awareness. We had management people tell us they didn't realize they had certain hazards," Hill said.

"There are so many hazards in our workplaces. If we can make ourselves aware of them, we can make the places safer."

He cited one example of this awareness: One employee said he had not realized that there were many potential hazards when he walked between his work area and the lunch area or break room.

"The plant manager told us our hazard mapping class was the best received and had the best feedback," Hill said. "The company thought Ashlee did well, and it

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asked her if she would consider returning to the site to do more training at some point.”

Local 7-2011 President Michael Spicknall said the hazard mapping class was well received by the members.

He said that usually management would have everyone sit in a room and offer ideas for root causes at one time, with one person struggling to write it all down.

“They think what they have is as good as the USW’s ‘Looking for Trouble’ training. It’s good, but I don’t think they always dive as deep as ‘Looking for Trouble’ does,” he said.

Solvay Expansion of Former Cytec Plant in West Virginia Creates More Union Jobs

Solvay’s \$70 million expansion of its Willow Island, W. Va., manufacturing plant is expected to create 30-40 new union jobs.

“Any time a company takes over a site and is looking to add jobs or build on, it’s always good news for existing employees because it shows interest in the facility,” said Local 8-499 Vice President Don Westbrook, who presides over the Solvay unit of the amalgamated local.

Solvay purchased the former Cytec plant in 2015. The Willow Island site is one of the company’s largest manufacturing facilities, and is located between Parkersburg and St. Mary’s, W. Va. It supplies global markets in the paint, coatings, adhesives, plastics, automotive and packaging industries.

Two different business segments operate there: Technology Solutions and Novacare.

Solvay Technology Solutions produces high molecular weight (HMW) hindered amine light stabilizers (HALS). This product provides ultraviolet light stabilization polymers used to extend the life and performance of plastic in outdoor conditions, such as for outside construction. It offers a stronger, lightweight alternative to materials like glass, metals and wood in consumer and industrial products.

Solvay Novacare produces specialty surfactants that are used in shampoos, detergents, paints, lubricants, plant protection, mining and oil extraction.

New Unit

The \$70 million expansion creates a second, fully independent HMW HALS manufacturing unit and complements the existing line at Willow Island. It is expected to be operational by mid-2019.

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Kalamazoo Local Approves Three-Year Contract

Local 220 production and maintenance workers at Solvay’s Kalamazoo, Mich., site ratified last February a three-year agreement that ends Feb. 26, 2021.

The contract covers 10 workers and contains general wage increases of 3 percent each year. This 9 percent wage hike over three years increases an employee’s benefits, while a signing bonus is a one-time shot and does not add to benefits over the long run. That is why it is better to have a wage increase than a bonus.

Under the agreement, bargaining unit employees can participate in the same health, welfare and 401(k) plans that salaried, non-union employees have, except for benefits regarding vacation, buying and selling of vacation, and severance. The cost per program or option is the same for each employee, with variations dependent upon which option is selected, the worker’s age and the number of dependents covered.

There are some minor contract language changes on items like overtime and the absentee and shift switching policies. Language concerning the lead operator position is changed.

The contract also provides for increases in the safety shoe allowance, gift card amount for perfect attendance and reimbursement for educational assistance.

Contract addendums include a Memorandum of Agreement regarding the 12-hour fixed shift schedule and Letters of Understanding regarding the KM Polymer department and posting of job openings.

Cytec owned the site until 2015 when Solvay acquired the property. Originally used as an alum plant, the site is now part of Solvay’s composite materials global business unit. The main product is KM polymers that are key toughening elements in resin systems. The aerospace industry uses the resin systems to produce composite components for the commercial and military aviation sectors.

(More Union Jobs continued from page 3)

Westbrook said most of the new jobs will be in production (operator positions), and additional maintenance workers will be added as well. Union labor will be used to build the expansion, and that will add more jobs for the building trades.

“These are jobs with good pay and good benefits,” he said. “They are solid, reliable jobs. We seldom see a layoff.”

Before the expansion announcement last October, Westbrook said there were about 80 hourly workers in the bargaining unit. That total rose to 95 hourly workers as the first part of the new unit was built and placed into operation at the end of January 2018.

Construction of the second half of the new unit has started. When the expansion is finished there will be 110-115 hourly workers in the bargaining unit, Westbrook said. He said this includes four more operator jobs in the Novicare unit on top of what the company planned to hire.

Westbrook said the new hires are getting acclimated to the plant and working in a chemical facility. All of them are on shift work, with most working 12-hour shifts. Once they complete the probationary period of 1,040 hours, they can join Local 8-499.

He said that local union officers are talking to the new hires about the union, but most have few questions because it's common to be union in the community.

Past Practice Rules in Safety Shoe Arbitration

When management at Solvay's Chicago Heights plant reinterpreted contract language regarding safety shoe reimbursement and unilaterally implemented its new policy, Local 7-765-01 filed a grievance, an unfair labor practice (ULP) charge and took the case to arbitration.

The local won.

The contract language for over 20 years stated: “Safety Shoes. The Company will provide each employee with up to \$300 each year for the purchase of Company approved safety shoes.”

In testimony before the arbitrator, the local said that Solvay and its predecessor, Rhodia, Inc., included a safety shoe allowance in workers' paychecks for the full \$300 amount after the anniversary date of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) each year on Jan. 16. Employees did not need to obtain approval for their safety shoes.

The dispute began several days after Jan. 16, 2016 when the local asked the company when the shoe payment would be made. At the time, both parties were in contract negotiations and had extended the old contract. Management said the shoe and other “reimbursements” would be handled when a new CBA was settled.

The local filed a grievance on Jan. 26 because withholding the shoe payment would violate the existing agreement. It also filed a ULP with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

It appeared to the local that the company was leveraging the safety shoe payment in order to apply pressure during negotiations for a new contract, and that it was going to unilaterally implement a change to the existing practice rather than negotiate over it.

The NLRB Region 13 director decided to let the arbitrator handle the ULP.

Solvay denied the grievance on Feb. 8, and the local modified it to demand that past practice be followed regarding payment for the safety shoes. The local also demanded that supervisors stop polling employees regarding their need for safety shoes.

Then, plant management said the safety shoe payment would be processed according to a modified procedure, HSE-1062. Employees would be reimbursed for their shoes, regardless of the pending negotiations, as long as they provided the name of the shoe manufacturer, the shoe type and its price plus tax. The local learned of this policy during the third step grievance meeting.

The company witness admitted to the arbitrator that even though HSE-1062 was not put into effect, Solvay followed it and did not share the policy with employees on a shared computer network. The company also admitted it never told the union prior to 2016 how it was going to handle the safety shoe payment from that point forward.

The union testified that Solvay's implicit concern of employee “abuse” of the safety shoe reimbursement was unfounded and without facts to back it up.

Arbitrator Award

The arbitrator said that all the union witnesses confirmed the long-standing past practice of payment and that the company's witness did not provide evidence contradicting this past practice.

The arbitrator also determined the company acted unilaterally when it changed the reimbursement policy without bargaining first with the union.

The local's grievance was granted. The arbitrator ruled for continuation of the past practice with the exception that employees would be subject to discipline for wearing safety shoes that do not conform to the standard adopted by the company. Lastly, Solvay had to cease and desist from implementing unilateral changes to the safety shoe provisions of the CBA.

