A Closer Look at Responsible Care

Is there a Broken Link?

With supply chains strung across the developing world, how can the chemical industry ensure that the end product is safe?

by Gail Krantzberg and Peter Topalovic

Responsible Care, which began in Canada in the early 1980s, is an important initiative of the worldwide chemical industry. Now adopted in 54 countries, the program is about building trust through ethical behavior, listening attentively to the evolving concerns of the public, and providing responses that clearly demonstrate the concerns have been heard.

In 2006, the IUPAC Committee on Chemistry and Industry (COCI) began a project to assess the history of Responsible Care and develop a case study of the program (project 2006-047-1-022). The now-completed project produced a couple of documents and teaching aids that are available to anyone interested in exploring Responsible Care in more detail. The first paper presented here, by Gail Krantzberg and Peter Topalovic, is a summary of the case study of the 1996 tragedy in which 80 Haitian children died from ingesting cough syrup tainted with diethylene glycol (DEG), a chemical commonly found in antifreeze. The second paper by Rober Slater is based on his presentation made at the 3rd IUPAC Conference on Green Chemistry (August 2010) and uses the Bhopal and Gulf BP incidents to explain how critical events can be turning points in defining policy agendas.

Although the application of Responsible Care has lead to significant improvements in the performance of the industry, incidents continue to occur. There are still many improvements to be made even within the industries that already adhere to the principles of Responsible Care. The articles contained in this issue of *CI* should help spark discussions about this important topic.

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www.iupac.org/web/ins/2006-047-1-022

In 1996, 80 Haitian children died from ingesting cough syrup tainted with diethylene glycol (DEG), a chemical commonly found in antifreeze. An investigation conducted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) found that Pharval, a local company that produced the cough syrup products Afebril and Valodon, did not contaminate the product at its site. Instead, a supposedly pharmaceutical-grade-shipment of glycerin, a key component in the most widely prescribed cough syrup in the country, was contaminated at its source in China. However, the Haitian company was under the assumption that the chemical was produced in Germany by VOS BV, owned by chemical giant Helm AG. According to a 1997 article in the *World Press Review*, Pharval felt that it didn't have to implement any quality controls on the imported product because of its presumed European origin.

Is BP the New Bhopal?

How Crises Set The Policy Agenda*

by Robert W. Slater

This article explores how critical events can be turning points in defining policy agendas for both the private and public sectors and for civil society. First, the article describes the general way that licenses to operate are awarded to enterprises. Then it examines why a significant operational failure—a crisis—gets so much attention and how short- and long-term changes emerge from the wreckage. The Bhopal and Gulf BP incidents are used as case studies.

*Paper based on a presentation made at the 3rd IUPAC Conference on Green Chemistry, 15–19 August 2010, Ottawa, Canada.