US Labor Department’s OSHA proposes $119,000 in fines to Honeywell International in Metropolis, Ill., for safety violations following vapor release

METROPOLIS, Ill. – The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has cited Honeywell International Inc. with 17 serious safety violations for process safety management violations after its Metropolis processing plant experienced a release of hydrogen fluoride vapor. Proposed penalties total $119,000.

The incident occurred on Dec. 22, 2010. There were no reported injuries as a result of the incident, which was rectified by the company’s internal response team.

"Honeywell International has a responsibility to properly train its employees, and to strictly adhere to safety procedures and processes in all facilities," said Tom Bielema, OSHA's area director in Peoria. "OSHA is committed to ensuring that all workers are provided a safe and healthful workplace."

Honeywell International processes raw/mine-extracted uranium into uranium hexafluoride, which is used in nuclear power generation applications. The company employs approximately 560 workers at the Metropolis facility.

An inspection was initiated under OSHA's national emphasis program on facilities that could potentially release hazardous chemicals. Violations include allowing cylinders to be exposed to physical damage; having inaccurate field verifications on tanks and values; using equipment that was not in compliance with recognized and generally accepted good engineering practices; failing to have clear written operating instructions for processes such as unloading hydrogen fluoride into storage tanks and switching storage tanks; failing to address human factors in relation to remote operating valves on the hydrogen fluoride storage tanks; failing to document and resolve issues addressed by the process hazard analysis team; failing to establish written procedures to maintain the integrity of process equipment; failing to implement written emergency operating procedures for emptying hydrogen fluoride tanks; failing to perform appropriate checks and inspections to ensure equipment was properly installed; and failing to establish and implement written procedures to manage changes to process chemicals, equipment and procedures. The company also was cited for a deficient incident report that did not include factors contributing to the vapor release and the recommendation resulting from the internal investigation.

A serious violation occurs when there is substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result from a hazard about which the employer knew or should have known.

The company has 15 business days from receipt of its citations and penalties to comply, request an informal conference with OSHA's area director or contest the findings before the independent Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission. Employers and employees with questions regarding workplace safety and health standards can call OSHA's Peoria office at 309-589-7033. To report workplace incidents, fatalities or situations posing imminent danger to workers, call the agency's toll-free hotline at 800-321-OSHA (6742).

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America’s working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit http://www.osha.gov.

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