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Chemical Safety Board/Protecting Communities from Industrial Accidents: U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy & Commerce Holds September 29th Oversight Hearing

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The United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy & Commerce held an oversight hearing ("Hearing") addressing the United States Chemical Safety Board ("CSB").

The Hearing was titled:

Protecting Communities from Industrial Accidents: Revitalizing the Chemical Safety Board

The CSB began operating in 1998 as an independent federal agency created under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. It is charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents. It is headquartered in Washington, D.C. The agency's board members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The CSB describes its activities as including root cause investigations of chemical accidents at fixed industrial facilities. As to root causes, the CSB notes that they are usually caused by:

- Deficiencies in safety management systems (but could be any factor that would have prevented the accident if that factor had not occurred)
- Equipment failures
- Human errors
- Unforeseen chemical reactions or other hazards

The agency does not undertake enforcement. Therefore, it does not issue penalties or citations. Instead, it makes recommendations to:

- Plants
- Regulatory agencies
- Industry organizations
- Labor groups

In other words, the CSB was designed to be non-regulatory and independent of other agencies.

The CSB investigative staff includes chemical and mechanical engineers, industrial safety experts, and other specialists with experience in the private and public sectors.

House Energy & Commerce Committee Frank Pallone, Jr., stated, in announcing the Hearing, that CSB has “faced significant challenges in fulfilling its mission.” As a result, the Hearing’s purpose was to “address the agency’s staffing, investigation backlog, and other issues and ensure CSB has the tools it needs to succeed.

A House Committee on Energy & Commerce staff memorandum provided an overview of the CSB and noted a number of the investigations and safety recommendations it has undertaken in regards to industrial accidents in the last several years. The memorandum also addresses:

- CSB expertise and board structure
- Persistent management, staffing, and governance issues which are stated to have impaired the CSB’s mission
- Prior House Energy & Commerce Committee activities

Katherine A. Lemos, Ph.D., Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of the CSB testified at the Hearing.

A link to the Hearing announcement, written statement of Chairman Pallone, Committee Memorandum, and testimony of Dr. Lemos can be found [here](#).