

Safety Scene: Industrial Explosions

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Interview with Howard Mavity, Partner, Fisher & Phillips LLP



Chem.Info's Safety Scene feature focuses on how to improve safety in processing plants. In this installment, we looking at explosion hazards facing processors, what the fallout of an industrial explosion can be and what processors can do to mitigate their risks. We spoke with Howard Mavity of the law firm Fisher & Phillips about industrial safety.

Q: What factors present the greatest threat of explosion within processing plants?

A: First, manufacturers face Industry setting challenges.

Since the catastrophic Imperial Sugar explosion (where I was onsite for the first seven days) most food processors recognized some potential for combustible dust explosions and "deflagration," which refers to the catastrophic pressure wave caused by the startled cloud of dust triggered (and ignited) by the initial explosion. However, so many factors are at play that even comparable "baking" facilities may present widely varying amounts of problems, or none at all.

Likewise, "breeding" processes and powdered beverages may present significant risks, and properly stored silos of sugar raise little concern. My point is that few safety and production subjects depend more on the specific facts.

One point is clear: almost every food processor which uses or generates small particles should conduct a Process Hazard Analysis (PHA) to determine hazards, and

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if necessary, solutions.

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