

The Buncefield Incident

Corrosion

Leak

Explosion

Three Simple Questions

Process Safety is about answering 3 simple questions:

- 1) "Do we understand what can go wrong?"
- 2) "Do we know what our systems are to prevent this happening?"
- 3) "Do we have information to assure us they are working effectively?"

Where do these questions come from?

The Buncefield Incident occurred on 11 December 2005 at the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal, an oil storage facility located near the M1 motorway by Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire, England. The terminal was the fifth largest oil-products storage depot in the United Kingdom, with a capacity of about 60,000,000 gallons of fuel. A simple tank overfill event that escalated into catastrophic explosion and fire, causing significant damage to the terminal and surrounding business and residential neighbours.

The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted the 5 operators of the terminal. At the end of the trial in June 2010, Gordon MacDonald, the then Director of Hazardous Installations Directorate (HID) for HSE, issued a challenge to high hazard industries on behalf of all the United Kingdom Competent Authorities to answer the above mentioned three questions from the boardroom down: 1) 'Do we understand what can

go wrong?', 2) 'Do we know what system are in place to prevent this happening?' and 3) 'Do we have assurance that these systems will work?'

Click on the image to watch the video



The challenge that HSE gave to the UK High Hazard Industry is applicable across the globe as these questions strip down the complex subject of process safety into a simple concept that is easy to understand. An organisation can test itself internally; can it answer these three questions in a structured and clear way?

The challenge is to answer all three questions at the same time.

These questions are not limited to thinking about people and the environment but can equally be applied to commercial risk management too.

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