

Meeting Report

6TH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON LOSS PREVENTION AND SAFETY PROMOTION IN THE PROCESS INDUSTRIES, HELD AT OSLO, NORWAY, 19-22 JUNE 1989

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If an interest in safety is aroused by the occurrence of disasters, it is not perhaps surprising that there are many conferences on the subject these days. However, as far as the process industries are concerned, the major international symposia held every three years have achieved a preeminent position. Other conferences may cover specialised topics more effectively but the symposia are broad and comprehensive with something to interest everyone and this is reflected in number of participants. The latest and 6th in the series was sponsored as on previous occasions by the European Federation of Chemical Engineering, and this time the cosponsors were the U.S. Centre for Chemical Process Safety with the Norwegian Society of Chartered Engineers providing the local organisation.

Prior to the symposium many predicted that the venue weather and cost would reduce the number of participants by comparison with the previous one held in Cannes in 1986. In the event the attendance was comparable with previous ones (just below 700 excluding accompanying persons) and the weather was even hotter than in Cannes. The only problem was the unfortunate combination of high temperatures and expensive liquid refreshments.

The organisation by the Norwegians was excellent and the venue of the Oslo Concert Hall could hardly have been bettered, though it was necessary to walk about 100 m horizontally and climb about the same distance vertically to reach the Norwegian Society of Engineers building, where many of the technical sessions were held.

Although 79 papers were presented the total offered was well in excess of this, so many had to be rejected and over 40 were accepted as posters. There was a small but interesting exhibition involving companies offering safety services and equipment.

As on previous occasions there were plenary sessions covering the general areas, with parallel sessions devoted to specific topics. The standard of visual

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aids was very good with few unreadable slides. The technical sessions included such topics as explosions, safe design, spills, and runaway reactions. Perhaps to those who attended the previous symposium the progress seemed less than dramatic but quantum leaps rarely occur in loss prevention. If we take a longer view, it is clear that we are gradually developing the expertise to design safer plants, in which even major mishaps give rise only to minor effects. The technical sessions included some good 'hard number', an example being the one by Siwek and Rosenberg on ethylene oxide decompositions.

The plenary sessions covered safety management, biotechnology, human factors, guidelines, cost benefit analysis and safety regulations. The C.C.P.S. representatives reported on the latest developments and we were updated on regulatory developments in biotechnology and major accident hazards. The plenary papers on the more general topics were perhaps a little disappointing. There is after all no real mystique to running our operations in a safe manner. The main requirements are commitment, common sense and perseverance. Thus the messages are simple ones that need to be put across in a clear, interesting, and informative manner. There seem to be few speakers these days who can hold the interest of an audience in the way Trevor Kletz once did with his telling phrases and every day analogies, like belt and braces!

Case histories always arouse much interest and with some justification. The basic causes of accidents are often very simple and unsubtle and perhaps for this reason are often overlooked. It is helpful to be reminded of what can happen and those safety professionals who argue that 'it couldn't happen in my plant' are likely to be sadly disillusioned.

All in all it proved a very interesting 3 days. In addition to the papers there were technical excursions to Norwegian plants, an accompanying persons programme, and last but not least a social programme. The latter included a mid-summer night beach barbecue, and an excellent reception at the city hall. The food and champagne must have cost the city a fortune, and were much appreciated.