

Chemical safety board could halt new investigations while it reboots

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Under new leadership, the Chemical Safety & Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) is hitting the reset button to put its embattled past behind it. The federal agency charged with investigating and issuing recommendations on chemical accidents wants to set an ambitious timeline for completing reports, but doing so will require a hold on new cases, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

C&EN Contributing Editor Jeff Johnson reports that the agency chair, Vanessa Allen Sutherland, who took the helm in August, is kicking off the CSB overhaul by focusing on completing reports for six delayed investigations by the end of 2015. Previously, the board had been known to take years to complete reports and had developed a reputation for dysfunction. Sutherland plans to change that and wants to finish all reports on remaining outstanding cases in early 2016. But to realize this timeline, the agency of 40 employees and a slim \$11 million annual budget is not planning to take on new investigations until 2016.

New accidents continue, however, and on Oct. 30, five students at a Virginia high school were sent to the hospital after a chemistry lab demonstration went awry. *C&EN* Senior Editor Jyllian Kemsley reports in a separate story that the 'rainbow' flame test demonstration caused a fire, injuring the students. The lab accident was similar to several that CSB has tracked in the past, but CSB does not plan to open an official investigation.

In the meantime, changes to the CSB are already taking place. In Oct., the board made an uncharacteristic move, approving a report on a 2009 explosion in Puerto Rico in a split vote. In the past, board members would typically resolve any differences of opinion in private and present a unified front to the public. Other shifts Sutherland wants to make include an increase in transparency and a new, cooperative tone.

More information: Chemical Safety Board on Hold - cen.acs.org/articles/93/i44/Ne...al-Safety-Board.html

Fire Injures Five Chemistry Students - cen.acs.org/articles/93/i44/Fi...ive-High-School.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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