

NEW CSB SAFETY VIDEO, 'HALF AN HOUR TO TRAGEDY,' HIGHLIGHTS TRAINING NEEDS FOR PROPANE EMERGENCIES

Washington, DC, October 9, 2008 - The U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) has released a new 23-minute safety video, "Half an Hour to Tragedy," based on the deadly propane gas explosion at the Little General convenience store in Ghent, West Virginia, in January 2007.

The CSB's final written report on the tragedy, which killed two emergency responders and two propane technicians, was approved at a public meeting in Beckley, West Virginia, on September 25.

The title of the video refers to the nearly thirty minutes that elapsed between the beginning of the propane release and the moment of the explosion. During that period, no evacuation occurred, and volunteer firefighters and others entered the flammable propane cloud.

The new video can be viewed on the CSB's video site, <<http://www.safetyvideos.gov/>> safetyvideos.gov, as well as the agency's YouTube channel, <<http://www.youtube.com/uscsb>> youtube.com/uscsb. Free DVD copies will become available within the next several weeks and can be pre-ordered by clicking on "Request DVD" on the Board's website, CSB.gov.

The video includes a seven-minute, 3-D computer animation showing how a defective valve on a 500-gallon propane storage tank shot propane directly into the store building through attic vents, during what was supposed to have been a routine change of propane service provider.

"This video shows how a number of factors - a tank placed too close to the building, a lack of necessary training for propane technicians, and a lack of awareness among technicians and responders to order an immediate evacuation - combined to take the lives of four people," said John Bresland, CSB chairman and CEO. "Across the United States, firefighters are responding to propane emergencies almost every day. Training and preparedness are the keys to preventing tragic accidents like the one in West Virginia last year," Mr. Bresland said.

West Virginia State Fire Marshal Sterling Lewis, Jr., is featured in the video, along with CSB investigators Robert Hall, P.E., and Jeffrey Wanko, P.E., C.S.P.

"Our hope is that fire departments and propane companies throughout the nation will view this video and study the Board's findings and recommendations," said Mr. Wanko. "The information in this video can save lives in case of a propane emergency."

The Board recommended mandatory training for propane technicians using improved training materials, regular hazardous materials training and drills for responders, and new propane release guidance for 911 emergency operators.

The CSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents. The agency's board members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. CSB investigations look into all aspects of chemical accidents, including physical causes such as equipment failure as well as inadequacies in regulations, industry standards, and safety management systems.

The Board does not issue citations or fines but does make safety recommendations to companies, industry organizations, labor groups, and regulatory agencies such as OSHA and EPA. Please visit our website, www.csb.gov



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phone 518.474.6746
fax 518.474.3240
email fire@dos.state.ny.us