

U.S. CHEMICAL SAFETY BOARD MEDIA AVAILABILITY  
SOUTHWEST INDUSTRIAL GASES INC.

JULY 28, 2007

STATEMENT BY CSB BOARD MEMBER BILL WARK

Good afternoon, and welcome to this media availability of the United States Chemical Safety Board – the CSB. We are an independent federal agency charged with investigating chemical accidents at fixed facilities. We are modeled after the National Transportation Safety Board, and our offices are located in Washington, D.C. We have a professional staff of engineers and other specialists with industry and government experience.

My name is Bill Wark, Board Member of the CSB and this afternoon we will be providing you with an update on the CSB's investigative activities into the July 25<sup>th</sup> acetylene tank fire and explosion.

As many of you know, the accident happened at Southwest Industrial Gases, a welding gas distributor. The facility receives shipments of welding gas that are delivered in metal canisters by trailer. Shortly after 9 am on Wednesday, Western Industrial Gas and Cylinders was making a routine delivery of acetylene – a highly flammable gas.

When a truck reaches the facility standard operating procedure calls for the driver to attach a pipe connection to the back of the trailer that runs between the trailer and the facility. After the trailer is attached to the pipe connection the supply valve is opened and gas is pumped from the cylinders in the truck to the facility's bottle filling system.

On the day of the incident, the driver parked the trailer, connected it to the facility and was preparing the trailer to supply gas. While preparing the trailer a malfunction occurred on the trailer. Witness accounts are consistent that the fire originated near or on a cylinder located at the rear of the trailer. This small fire on the rear of the trailer was the source of the blaze that swept through the facility minutes later. We are still conducting interviews and analysis seeking to determine why this small fire occurred

Because the trailer and its components were essentially obliterated we do not anticipate conducting any testing on equipment from the trailer.

We may ultimately test equipment of similar design in an effort to replicate what happened here on Wednesday.

We are establishing a timeline on the rapid progression of events; we have concerns about the speed at which the fire grew. A similar accident investigated by the CSB involved gas cylinders at the Praxair facility in St. Louis, Missouri. The CSB's report found that a fire in one cylinder moved to adjacent cylinders in

less than a minute. At 2 minutes, cylinders began exploding, flying into other areas of the facility, and spreading the fire. After 4 minutes, the fire covered most of the facility's flammable gas cylinder area. Like this incident many cylinders were propelled from the facility and flew in the surrounding community.

It's obvious that events like this put workers, the public, and fire fighters at risk. As evident in both these incidents it takes only seconds for fire to spread from one cylinder to another. And of course everyone is concerned that so many cylinders were propelled off-site. These objects are heavy, hot, sharp, moving at a very high speed and capable of doing great damage.

As you saw on the news footage, this fire grew out of control very rapidly. One of the areas that we will be considering is what types of fire suppression systems might be able to mitigate the rapid progression of fires such as this. Gas distribution facilities like this are regulated under a variety of OSHA standards and fire codes.

In our Praxair report we outlined good practices to better contain an event such as this one through fire mitigation, fire barriers and gas detection. Our final Praxair report, which can be found at [csb.gov](http://csb.gov), gives several examples of good practices to mitigate fire including the use of fire monitors, deluge and sprinkler systems. In the event of a cylinder fire the presence of these types of fire protection will help cool the cylinders reducing the likelihood of additional gas releases, fire spread, and off-site consequences.

To date, we have largely completed our on-scene examination of the Southwest Industrial Gases facility. While our site examination is complete, we still have a few interviews that we hope to be able to conduct including those with technical management from Western International Gas and Cylinders Inc. as well as employees with Southwest Industrial Gases.

All parties have cooperated fully with the CSB and we have enjoyed excellent cooperation with the other agencies present at the site. They include the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Department of Transportation Office of Hazardous Materials Safety, Homeland Security's Chemical Security Compliance Division and the National Transportation Safety Board. We would also like to thank the Dallas Fire and Police Department for their outstanding assistance.

Today, the CSB investigative team is returning to Washington, D.C. to brief agency officials and analyze the information we have gathered from the site. Depending on the course of the investigation, we expect to return periodically to Dallas and other locations to gather more information.

The CSB's investigations are lengthy, painstaking efforts that can take a year or more to complete. However, as new information becomes available, we will keep the community here and the industry informed. We do all this, of course, in an effort to prevent these serious chemical accidents that cause injuries, destroy property, and jeopardize public safety.

Our ultimate product will be safety recommendations designed to prevent a recurrence of this accident, here or at the hundreds of other similar facilities in cities and towns all across the country.

Thank you for attending today, and we will be happy to answer your questions.