

Breakout: Chemical Security

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In this breakout session, participants addressed the question: What can organizations like the WETP awardees do to facilitate better protection from terrorist attacks at their facilities and what is the importance of prevention in mitigating the effects of terrorism?

Discussion opened with a highly cited statistic. According to the EPA Risk Management Program (RMP) data, there are 123 chemical facilities in the United States that, if attacked, could place more than one million people at risk. These figures account for both workers and community members placed at risk.

THEME: Balancing Prevention and Emergency Response

Understanding the heightened security risks facing chemical plants and their workers, it is important to consider the response potential against the disaster potential. The latter far outweighs the former, arguing for the need to focus on prevention strategies aimed at balancing the situation. We can no longer look at emergency response in isolation of risk reduction.

Tom McQuiston explained that PACE has been actively promoting the theme of prevention in its own training for years. They have recently developed a new curriculum that focuses on how to take all elements of the Process Safety Management (PSM) standard, and using those systems of safety, examine what can happen and how these systems can be used to prevent incidents from happening at a trainee's facility. And, for example, what new inherent safety considerations a re-visited "Process Hazard Analysis" might raise now that the possibility of an intentional act can be viewed as a "process hazard."

Session participants agreed that unless we start pushing prevention as an all-hazard, everyday issue, significant change would not occur. The suggestion was made that the PSM standard may be a good start as a model for a chemical/hazardous site safety approach, and that it should be made clear that just having an emergency response plan is not good enough at these facilities. Prevention elements must be combined closely at the worker level so that they can see the success.

The discussion then turned toward the issue of taking action in order to enact real change. There are obviously limits to what people and resources can do, but some organizations, such as the ACC, have made efforts to define vulnerability assessments and draft industry guidelines. The drawback to such consensus-driven efforts, however, is that they tend to accommodate the lowest common denominator. As for elevating it to the federal level, OSHA penalties tend to be low in comparison to the disaster potential, and the standards-making process can stretch out for years. What, then, can we do?

Representatives from PACE suggested following their own example by engaging in dialogue with workers whose plants have resolved some of these problems through prevention strategies (getting rid of chlorine, for example). These examples can be mimicked at plants throughout the country. Education will be a key component of any action plan.

Discussion also focused on chemical incident impacts on firefighters and construction workers, and therefore on the need for a common approach towards primary prevention that would optimize the roles, responsibilities and collaborations among industrial workers, members of the building trades and emergency responders.