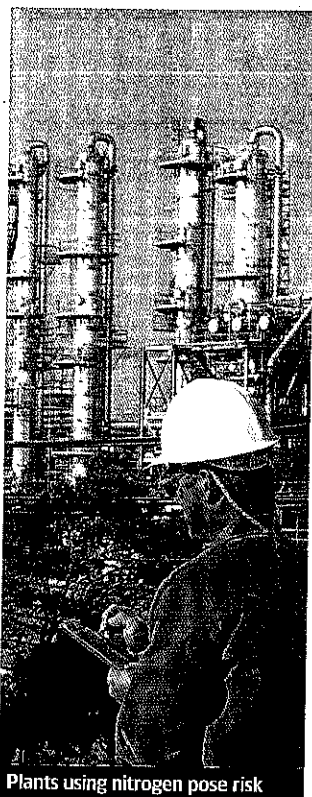


The US may require odorizing of nitrogen



Plants using nitrogen pose risk

JOE KAMALICK

FEDERAL HEALTH officials said last week they will revive a seven-year-old inquiry into workplace hazards of nitrogen gas to determine whether the odorless and colorless gas should be odorized for safety reasons.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health said it will revisit a long-dormant inquiry on odorizing nitrogen that was presented to the institute in 1999 by the US Chemical Safety & Hazard Investigation Board (CSB).

The board had asked the institute to "conduct a study concerning the appropriateness and feasibility of odorizing nitrogen in order to warn personnel" who might be at risk of nitrogen asphyxiation in workplace environments.

The board made the request after 21 US workers were killed over a six-year period due to nitrogen asphyxiation. Last

week, the board issued another special safety notice to industry about the potentially fatal consequences of nitrogen poisoning.

Fred Blosser, spokesman for the safety and health institute, said his agency had discussed workplace hazards of nitrogen with the safety board in 1999 and later but that the institute had not made a formal reply to the safety board and the issue was sidelined by other budget matters.

However, in light of more recent fatalities associated with nitrogen asphyxiation, Blosser said the institute is going to look at the issue anew and make a formal reply to the safety board, probably within a few months.

The CSB is investigating a Nov. 3 South Carolina accident in which a chemical specialties plant worker died, apparently from nitrogen poisoning.

Nitrogen is widely used in the refining and chemicals industries where many of the asphyxiation accidents have occurred.

IN BRIEF

Environment watch

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES' PROJECTS GET FUNDING

The Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management's (Saicm) Quick Start Programme Trust Fund, has approved three projects to receive funding. The Quick Start Programme (QSP) supports developing countries and those with economies in transition in the areas of initial capacity building and implementation of Saicm. The three projects have received \$726,696 (€596,520) in funding. Five projects with a combined value of \$1.2m have been conditionally approved and 19 were recommended for amendment and resubmission. Four were declined.

US FIRMS AIM FOR A GREENER FUTURE

The Environmental Protection Agency said more organizations are recognizing the financial and environmental benefits of committing to go beyond regulatory requirements. Thirty-two more businesses have joined the Agency's Performance Track program, where companies engage in improvements in environmental performance.

US breathes cleaner air

ACCORDING TO the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), the percentage of children living in counties that do not meet air-quality standards for fine particulate matter, fell from 24% to 16% between 1999 and 2004.

Levels of lead in the blood of young children have also fallen by 89% over a 25-year period.

The data was derived from an update to "America's Children

and the Environment," an EPA compilation of information from federal databases.

The data looks at trends in environmental contaminant levels in air, water, food and soils.

It also considers levels measured in the bodies of children and women, and childhood illnesses and health conditions such as asthma that may be influenced by exposure to environmental contaminants.

Disputes delay Reach

INTENSE DEBATE between the European Parliament, the council of ministers and the EU's Finnish presidency now means the second reading on the Reach chemical legislation will take place on Dec. 12, a month later than planned.

Finland wants to see the legislation finalized before it hands over the presidency at the end of the year and is trying to bring about a compromise and

so avoid what could be a lengthy conciliation process.

The industry remains concerned that mandatory substitution, strongly supported by the European Parliament, is gaining increasing backing and will form part of the final legislation.

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