



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

PRESS OFFICE

No.6 Convent Place

Gibraltar

Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

PRESS RELEASE

No: 342/2011

Date: 17th November 2011

Fire and explosion on 31st May 2011 at the Nature Port Reception Facilities site at the Western Arm

Following the fire and explosion that occurred on 31st May 2011 at the Nature Port Reception facilities site at the Western Arm, Government commissioned Capita Symonds who are specialised and highly experienced in the investigation of incidents of this sort in the UK and elsewhere, to undertake an external and independent investigation into the incident.

Government is now in the receipt of and has considered the findings of the Capita Symonds report and is to-day publishing the document on line. It is available on the Government Website www.gibraltar.gov.gi.

The investigations undertaken by Capita Symonds examined the causes of the incident, the adequacy of the Plant Operators Management systems and health and safety and Accident Management procedures and plans, and the condition of the tanks and plant.

The report's main findings:

Direct Cause of Explosion.

The cause of the explosion has been attributed to the holes in the roof of the tanks that allowed flammable vapour to escape from the tank and into the atmosphere. The welder, who had been welding a pipe to the guardrail at the roof of one of the two main tanks, struck an arc when he began welding and in the opinion of the investigator, that arc caused the escaping vapour to ignite. This in turn flashed to the vapour in the roof void of the tank, between the stored product and the roof, and ignited it. The heat rapidly built up pressure and then blasted a hole in the weld sealing the roof to the body of the tank on the opposite side of the tank to the two men. It sent flames and smoke in a vertical direction. Seconds after, the main explosive rupture occurred close to where the welding was being undertaken, with flames and smoke shooting out almost horizontally. The flash was transmitted from Tank 1 to tank 2 via pipework sited on the top of each tank.

Main Findings

1. Failure to manage contractors when undertaking welding operations within the site;
2. Failure to repair, corrosion perforations on the roofs of Tanks 1 and Tank 2 that had been identified, but not repaired.
3. There appears to have been a number of significant departures from a sound health and safety management system expected of any organisation operating a potentially hazardous plant such as this.
4. The health and safety and accident management policies and procedures of the facility lacked sufficient detail.
5. The vetting process to ensure that sub-contractors carried out their work safely was not transparent, nor was it clear that Nature appreciated the need to keep close contact with the sub-contractor's men, especially in the absence of the sub-contractor's supervisor.
6. The examination of the roof section of Tank No1 revealed that it had over twenty (20) perforations of the plating, all of which had been caused by long term corrosion.
7. The examination of the roof section of Tank No 2 revealed that it had over forty (40) perforations of the plating, once again all of which had been caused by long term corrosion.
8. The main conclusion reached is that prior to the explosions and fire on 31 May 2011, the integrity of the both tanks would have been breached by many corrosion related perforations in the roof structure and that neither tank would have been hermetically tight.

The Investigators consider that the continued operation of the plant in this location should be the subject of a detailed review.

In the light of these findings, the suspension of Nature Port's licence will not be lifted until a final decision is taken with regard to that licence after due process has been followed and all the material facts and issues considered. The deficiencies, failings and shortcomings found in the report, and the extent to which they may have been remedied or be capable of remedy are material factors.

In any event, the operation of the sullage plant in its present location will be the subject of a detailed review by Government.