



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

AREA PANEL 1 1 September 2004

Report of Assistant Director - Development

Response to Petition regarding Acordis Fire

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1.1 The petition signed by 37 residents from Vancouver Avenue and surrounds, Spondon, is headed: " We are asking you to get the reasons of the fire on 2 May 2004. We are very concerned that no one was told to shut windows and doors, the wind could have changed anytime".
- 1.2 On 2 May a fire started in an area some 8m by 3m occupied by five pumps in a bunded enclosure within the Acetate Products Ltd site. A bearing in one of the pumps had failed causing the shaft seal to fail and allowing benzene to leak from the pump. The hot surface of the failed pump provided the ignition source. The fire triggered an automatic detection alarm at 18:35, and the emergency services were on site at 18:50. It took until 22:51 to extinguish the fire because the 700 °C heat of the fire made it difficult to access the isolation valve. The valve was eventually isolated by Acetate Products Technicians at 22:40 assisted by the Fire Service, who then extinguished the fire quickly. The Site Emergency Services Team, all fully trained Firemen, provided support.
- 1.3 The Health and Safety Executive, HSE sets exposure levels for employees for Benzene with a maximum of 1 part per million. On the evening of the incident Acetate Products Ltd carried out perimeter monitoring and at 20:00 the reading was less than 0.5ppm; for comparison when filling a car with petrol a driver is exposed to 1-2ppm. Acetate Products explained to the Community Liaison Panel on 20 May that benzene is less dangerous when it burns as it produces carbon and water, rather than vapour. The closest residential property is on Anglers Lane. Diffusion tube monitoring is used by the City Council to measure fortnightly benzene levels in this locality. For the fortnight of 28 April 2004 to 12 May 2004, the average benzene concentration recorded at Anglers Lane was 8.2 microgrammes per cubic metre. This fortnightly concentration is fairly typical for the site in question. However, due to the fortnightly averaging period, it is not possible to determine whether within this 2-week period, there was a peak concentration due to the fire. This is of course presuming that the wind direction and weather conditions at the time of the fire would have resulted in elevated benzene concentrations at this particular monitoring location.

- 1.4 The site is now only subject to the lower tier requirements of the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) Regulations 1999, which means that off-site plans are not legally required. However, the company maintains voluntarily an off-site plan which is updated annually and subject to joint training and exercises with the Emergency Services. The plan covers an area some 400m from the benzene store. This only involves a few residential properties. Within an incident of this nature the off-site effects are always considered to establish what, if any, information should be given to the public. On this occasion the wind direction was away from the main residential area and it was considered by the Emergency Services that there was no risk to residents and therefore no information was given. Part of the off-site plan was implemented when the Police established road-blocks, however. Wind direction was monitored during the incident and if there had been a danger of exposure to residents action would have been taken.

PROPOSED ACTION

- 2.1 The rebuilt pump station is being designed to address all of the factors arising from the incident investigation and Acetate Products Ltd are carrying out further risk assessments to improve on-site capabilities. Any action considered necessary in relation to the voluntary off-site plan will be addressed in the review of the plan which will be co-ordinated by the Chief Emergency Planning Officer as part of his Service Level Agreement with the City Council.

The lead petitioner has been written to outlining the results of the investigation. +No further action is considered necessary.

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Background papers: None
List of appendices: None