

Facts on the Bhopal Disaster

From K. Weick, 2010

- 1) The shared knowledge of the close knocking off of the Union Carbide plant provokes depression and lack of motivation for people still at work.
- 2) Many technical devices do not work – in the control room as well as on the tank gauges – control procedure must regularly be double checked.

3) Facts :

Three teams work respectively from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. (team 1), from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. (team 2), and from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. (team 3).

A) before the accident

- Two new people work in team 2, a worker who's mission will be this day to clean the pipes for tanks 610, 611 and 619, and the team supervisor. The supervisor mission and responsibilities have been changed two weeks before the accident, simultaneously to the worker change.
- The supervisor had not been specifically trained for the pipes cleaning : he is not yet familiar with the various steps of the cleaning procedures and maintenance. Particularly important, nobody makes clear the necessity to insert metal discs at end of each pipe during the cleaning process to prevent water backup.
- During the cleaning operation, people could have noticed that water was backing up in the tank 610 because of a low pressure in the pipes – nobody pays attention to it.
- The cleaning operation is pursued until 00 :15 a.m., team 3 was asked to close the tapes end of the operation.
- Water fills the 610 tank, preparing the chemical reaction with the methyl isocyanate gas.
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B) The accident

- 11:30 p.m., a team member says he can feel the gas smell – his colleagues tell him this is the usually employed Flytox (mosquito spray) in the plant control room.
- Midnight, people eyes scream – significant symptom of a probable preoccupying gas leak.
- meantime (11:40 p.m.), an employee mentions that the pressure in the tank 610 increased from 2 to 30 psig, the maximum tolerated being around 2 psig. The supervisor replies gauges do not work – the tea brake is continued..
- Midnight, two employees go to the 610 tank for a pressure double check. The local gauges show the same pressure as the control room ones. They as well can see the tank throbbing as when important chemical reactions occur.
- The supervisor is alerted and runs for checking the tank. He sees the first chemical reaction damages from a 6 weeks earlier shut down tank. He murmures : “It's not true !”.