Dealing With Hazards Fatality Report

On Jan. 5, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) released a report on the three deadly fires and explosions that occurred at a Hoeganaes Corp. plant in Gallatin, Tenn., in 2011. The report asserts that the accumulation of fine iron powder in the facility led to the explosions, and that Hoeganaes did not take necessary action to prevent these fatal events.

Five workers died and three were injured in three separate incidents at Hoeganaes Corp.’s Gallatin powdered metals plant in 2011. When fine particles of iron dust ignited on Jan. 31, two workers were burned and later died from their injuries. On March 29, a similar flash fire burned another employee. Finally, on May 27, a hydrogen explosion at the plant shook loose iron dust accumulations, which ignited and rained down on workers. The explosion and ensuing fire killed three employees and injured two others.

“The three accidents at the Hoeganaes facility were entirely preventable. Despite evidence released by the CSB and information that Hoeganaes had in its possession even before the first accident in January 2011, the company did not institute adequate dust control or housekeeping measures,” said CSB Chairperson Rafael Moure Eraso.

According to CSB, significant amounts of the fine iron powder had accumulated over time in the facility and the company did not reduce the hazards through engineering controls and basic housekeeping. Furthermore, the investigation found that Hoeganaes did not institute procedures such as combustible gas monitoring or provide training for employees on avoiding flammable gas fires and explosions. CSB also found that the company did not require atmospheric testing for hydrogen or other explosive gases.