Perspectives on Risk Communication and Dialogue for the Process Industries

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ABSTRACT

Many companies in the US are beginning to communicate their compliance with the US Environmental protection Agency's (EPA's) Risk Management Program (RM Program) rule to the public. This rule requires the development and implementation of a risk management programme that is available for public inquiry.

Unlike environmental permit actions requiring public notices and public hearings that meet very stringent guidelines, compliance with this rule does not specify the procedures for public participation. This has resulted in a variety of nationwide public outreach programmes.

The challenges are three-fold: 1. Finding the right computer models and technology to accomplish the requirements 2. Translating the complex technical issues and modeling results into effective communication vehicles 3. Drawing the highest degree of interest and public participation in the process.

While the risk communication activities in the US are to some extent mandated by regulatory action, public clamour and the need for better emergency planning and preparation will make it necessary for all companies worldwide to start making process risk information available to the public. This risk communication effort especially difficult as it requires the communication of highly technical and sensitive information. The dilemma is further complicated because surveys indicate that the public would like the industry to conduct some form of risk communication and yet there is considerable public apathy when risk communication events are planned.