Keynote Paper:
Improving Safety Performance in the new Millennium and the Role of Universities

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ABSTRACT

Although the safety record of the process industries is good, almost all the accidents that occur need not have occurred. Often, after an accident, we miss opportunities to learn and remember:

- Accident reports are often superficial, dealing only with the immediate causes. We should also look for ways of avoiding the hazards, such as inherently safer design, and for weaknesses in the management system.
- Accident reports often list human error as a cause without saying what sort of error. Yet different actions are needed to prevent those due to ignorance, those due to slips or lapses of attention and those due to non-compliance.
- They often list causes we can do little about.
- We do not allow others to learn as much as they could from our experiences.
- We forget the lessons learned and the accident happens again. We need databases that can present relevant information without the user having to ask for it.

Safety training should start with accidents and draw lessons from them, for two reasons: First, accident reports grab our attention more effectively than naked advice and, second, the accident is the most important bit. We may not agree with the recommendations but we should not ignore the accident. The influence of universities can be crucial.