Combustible Dust Explosions and Compliance - Especially For Food Processors

Insights
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I have linked to an Interview by the good folks at Chem.Info.com, an excellent publication and provider, especially for food processors and related businesses.

We represented construction employers at the 2008 Port Wentworth Sugar Plant (Imperial Sugar) explosion and both before and since that explosion, we have handled many combustible dust matters in food processing, wood and paper, coal products, plastics, foundries and for numerous other manufacturers. Combustible Dust compliance remains one of the most understood and most dangerous of safety compliance areas. For more information on the Imperial Sugar explosion, which remains highly instructional, go to the *Savannah Daily News* archived special coverage.

Safety Scene: Industrial Explosions
Fri, 05/10/2013 - 9:16am
Krystal Gabert, Editor

Interview with Howard Mavity, Partner, Fisher Phillips
Chem.Info's recurring Safety Scene feature focuses on how to improve safety in processing plants. In this installment, we looking at explosion hazards facing processors, what the fallout of an industrial explosion can be and what processors can do to mitigate their risks. We spoke with Howard Mavity of the law firm Fisher Phillips about industrial safety.

Q: What factors present the greatest threat of explosion within processing plants?
A: First, manufacturers face Industry-specific challenges.

Since the catastrophic Imperial Sugar explosion (where I was onsite for the first seven days) most food processors now recognize some potential for combustible dust explosions and *"deflagration*," which refers to the catastrophic pressure wave caused by the startled cloud of dust triggered (and ignited) by the initial explosion. However, so many factors are at play that even comparable "baking" facilities may present widely varying amounts of problems, or none at all.

Likewise, "breading" processes and powdered beverages may present significant risks, and properly stored silos of sugar raise little concern. My point is that few safety and production subjects depend more on the specific facts.

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One point is clear: almost every food processor which uses or generates small particles should conduct a Process Hazard Analysis (PHA) to determine hazards, and if necessary, solutions.
Second, manufacturers face operational challenges

An attitude of *"we've never had a problem before"* is a significant problem. Processors would do well to remember that the sugar refinery had gone over 90 years without an event… until one factor changed. Many food processes and equipment have not changed in many years, and combustible dust control was not the manufacturer's concern when they were developed.

"Management of Change" is my largest concern. Many are aware **(please continue reading at Chem.Info site)**

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