

Lest We Forget!

What do these dates have in common: December 7, 1941, November 22, 1963, September 11, 2001? They are all dates of events which everybody in the United States will always remember. Unfortunately they were tragedies – the attack on Pearl Harbor, the assassination of President Kennedy, and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. These are dates that we remember in the United States. In your culture or country the dates and events will be different and those above may be less memorable – after all much of the rest of the world had been at war for several years before December 1941, and many other countries have suffered major terrorist attacks. Think about the important dates in your history and why you remember them.

What about July 20, 1969? Do you know that date? It's the day that the first man walked on the moon. That was a more glorious day in history but perhaps not as well remembered. Why? Psychologically, we tend to remember the bad things more than the good. Remembering the bad can cause us pain or sense of loss, but we continue to remember.

It is the same with serious process events. Next month, it will be 5 years since the explosion at a refinery in Texas City, Texas, which killed 15 people and injured 180. There are dates in every company's history that are remembered for serious events. Is there a ceremony to reflect on their anniversary? Probably not, but they are as important as the release of the most successful products. Remembering them can be a painful experience, especially for those who lost close friends and coworkers, but we must remember so we can work to make sure these tragedies never happen again.



President Kennedy moments before the assassination



A piece of the fuselage of United Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001



Aftermath of the March 23, 2005 Texas City refinery explosion

Do you know?

- The process industries throughout the world form a common culture, defined by the kinds of industrial plants that we operate, and the hazards of the materials and processes that we use. This culture crosses national boundaries, and there are dates in our history which we must never forget. Two of those were remembered in the November and December 2009 Beacons – November 19, 1984 (Mexico City LPG terminal fire and explosion) and December 3, 1984 (Bhopal, India toxic gas release).
- “Man seems to insist on ignoring the lessons available from history.” – Norman Borlaug, American botanist and 1970 Nobel Peace Prize recipient for contributions to the world food supply
- “We live in the present, we dream of the future, but we learn eternal truths from the past.” – Madame Chiang Kai-Shek

What can you do?

- Ask senior workers about incidents of the past. They do not have to be serious explosions, but could be process upsets that nearly caused an incident, or process failures that caused a major quality or operational problem.
- Document the incidents of the past in a form where they can be easily revisited.
- Share these lessons with new people in your plant, from the plant janitor to the plant manager, so they all can learn from them.
- Use the log of past events during Process Hazard Analyses and other hazard reviews to remind everybody of what can happen.
- Read and share the Beacon to understand incidents that have occurred somewhere else, and what you need to do to make sure they don't happen to you!

**“There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.”
 – Harry S. Truman, US President**

On behalf of all of the readers of the Beacon in 33 languages, CCPS and the CCPS Process Safety Beacon Committee would like to thank all of our volunteer translators for their efforts on behalf of process safety throughout the world in 2009. With this issue of the Beacon, we celebrate 100 issues since November 2001.

All translators are volunteers, and the only compensation that they receive is the knowledge that their efforts are helping to improve process safety throughout the process industries. Because of their volunteer efforts, CCPS is able to distribute the Process Safety Beacon in 33 languages as of December 2009. If you know, or meet, any of our translators in the course of your work, please thank them personally for their work. If you are interested in translating the Beacon into a language which is not currently available, please contact us at ccps_beacon@aiche.org and we will provide you with information on the procedure for translation.

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NOTE: Robert has provided French translations of all 100 issues of the Beacon !

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