



International exchange of experience on industry-connected accidents of the explosives industries

**NEWSLETTER**

**8th Edition December 2001**

**SAFEX ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION  
TRAINING EVENT  
AMSTERDAM 28th/29th May 2001**

SAFEX International's first pre-Congress Training Event on "Incident Investigation" has already proved to be a very popular innovation. 26 out of the 30 places have already been reserved (allocated on a first come first served basis) so applications for the few remaining places should be made immediately to the Secretary General.

The limitation of 30 places on this training event was decided by the Governing Committee in conjunction with the tutors (The Kelvin Consultants) because it was intended that this should be an interactive course with a high tutor/participant ratio. It was felt that, if the numbers in the classroom grew to much more than 30, then the Training Event would be reduced simply to a series of one-sided lectures to the detriment of all concerned.

For these reasons, the upper limit of 30 will be strictly observed.

**FLORIADE 2002**

The Floriade is a world horticultural exhibition that takes place every 10 years and has now become the largest public event in the Netherlands. Over 3 million people are expected to visit the Floriade in the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer near Amsterdam in the year 2002.

An area covering 50 hectares is undergoing complete transformation.

Features include the Big Spotters Hill, a panoramic hill that rises 40 metres above the flat countryside (high for Holland) and a magnificent floral valley containing one and a half million bulbs.

Unfortunately there is so much to see and do in Holland that we have been unable to include a visit to the Floriade in our official Social Programme. However, our conference organisers have agreed that if sufficient people wish to stay over then a joint coach outing can be organised for Sunday 2nd June.

If there are more than 30 interested people, then an informal outing from the Novotel in Amsterdam to the Floriade can be organised. Please note that this will possibly need an extra Hotel night and this must be booked as soon as possible.

If you are interested in this possibility, please let the Secretary General know when you register to attend the SAFEX International XIV Congress in Amsterdam

## **SAFEX INTERNATIONAL XIV CONGRESS**

### **29th May – 1st June 2002**

Following the events of the 11th September, conference organisers have become very nervous about the forecast numbers who will attend Congresses.

For this reason, delegates to the SAFEX XIV Congress are advised to submit their applications to the Secretary General as soon as possible.

Early registration will help the organisation to ensure a smooth well-oiled event.

### **SERIOUS AMMONIUM NITRATE ACCIDENT AT TOULOUSE, FRANCE**

On the 21st September at “La Grande Paroisse”, an AZF Ammonium Nitrate Plant near Toulouse, over 300 tonnes of Ammonium Nitrate detonated resulting in the death of 29 people. One of those killed was in the SNPE factory which is some 300 metres distant from “La Grande Paroisse “ and separated by a branch of the River Garonne.

Shortly after investigations were started the local Prosecutor declared himself “99%” satisfied that the event was an accident and not an act of sabotage. The resulting crater is approximately 60 metres wide by 50 metres deep, and it is difficult to speculate on how the prosecutor came so quickly to his conclusion.

Material held in store comprised both “fertiliser grade” and “industrial grade” (i.e. porous prills) Ammonium Nitrate.

Speculation in the European Press has been rife as to the cause of the accident and at the time of writing few hard facts are known.

Press reports include the following:

- 2 witnesses claim to have seen a streak of light in the sky immediately before they heard the explosion.
- One surviving operator is said to have visited the storage half an hour before the explosion and detected no smoke or fire.

The European Parliament held a plenary debate on the topic when it was reported that the plant was subject to the requirements of the Seveso II Directive.

- At the time of writing no one has reported any obvious cause of detonation, neither fire nor impact.

There is little point in adding to the existing speculation until the results of the inquiries are known, but most explosives specialists will agree that for Ammonium Nitrate to detonate (please note that we are talking about Ammonium Nitrate and not Ammonium Nitrate and Fuel Oil) then either the material has to be subject to considerably raised temperatures as in a serious fire or, alternatively, it has to be subject to a severe impact such as the detonation of a high strength detonator or booster.

It seems unlikely that this accident will pass without some serious effect on the explosives industry, at least in Europe.

## Commission Statement to the European Parliament on AZF accident in Toulouse

It was a solemn start to this month's first plenary session, as the European Parliament observed a minute of silence for the victims of the AZF accident in Toulouse. Commissioner Wallström spoke on behalf of the Commission in its statement on the accident.

Mrs Wallström spoke clearly and succinctly on the matter, noting that as yet the exact cause of the accident was still unknown and that three separate investigations were underway. The first investigation was being carried out by Atofina, the second by the French Ministry of the Environment, and the third by the French Attorney-General.

She stated that AZF had been fully covered by the Seveso II directive and made a clear statement:

*At the moment, despite rumours in the press, the Commission has no indication that there was either a deficiency on behalf of the operator managing the plant and complying with Seveso II or on behalf of the French control authorities responsible for inspecting the site."*

The Commissioner noted that some countries have as yet failed to fully implement the directive. However, the court proceedings underway with regard to France, could in no way be related to the Toulouse accident in terms of possible infringements of obligations under the Seveso II Directive.

Mrs Wallström also noted that the Regulatory Committee established under Seveso II would be meeting on 10-12 October to discuss the accident and its follow up.

As regards new Article 12 on land use planning in Seveso II (the article seeks to keep hazardous industrial plants away from inhabited areas), she noted that it only applied to new industrial sites and cannot be retroactively applied.

Of the speakers that followed, all were concerned to give their message of condolence to the families of the victims and to the people of Toulouse, but all had clear agendas.

Mrs De Veyrac (PPE-F), deputy Mayor of Toulouse, and Mrs Berès (PSE-F) both sought the allocation of emergency Community funds to the town. Mrs De Veyrac also sought the tightening of rules governing hazardous plants with the upcoming review of Seveso II, and Mrs Berès felt that the Industry should assume responsibility in the payment of indemnities both to the Victims' families and to the town for damage caused by the explosion.

On the Issue of the upcoming review of Seveso II, opinions varied. Mrs Ries (ELDR-B) believed that a Seveso III was not the answer, and that the Community should be looking to ensure the full implementation of the existing directive, questioning industry's commitment to Seveso II.

Mrs Ainardi (GUE/NGL-F) on the other hand felt that a full review of the existing legislation was in order. She pointed clearly towards the irresponsible attitude of the Chemical Industry's Management in managing risk assessment.

Mr Onesta (Verts/ALE-F) went a step further stating that Seveso, as it stood, did not work and instead of risk management he would opt for risk distancing, questioning the need for such fertilizer plants in modern Europe. Of hazardous plants, as a whole, he believed relocation of these plants to be the best answer.

Commissioner Wallström closed the debate by stating that it was far too early to take extreme measures and that at present the Commission opted for reviewing Seveso II as planned.

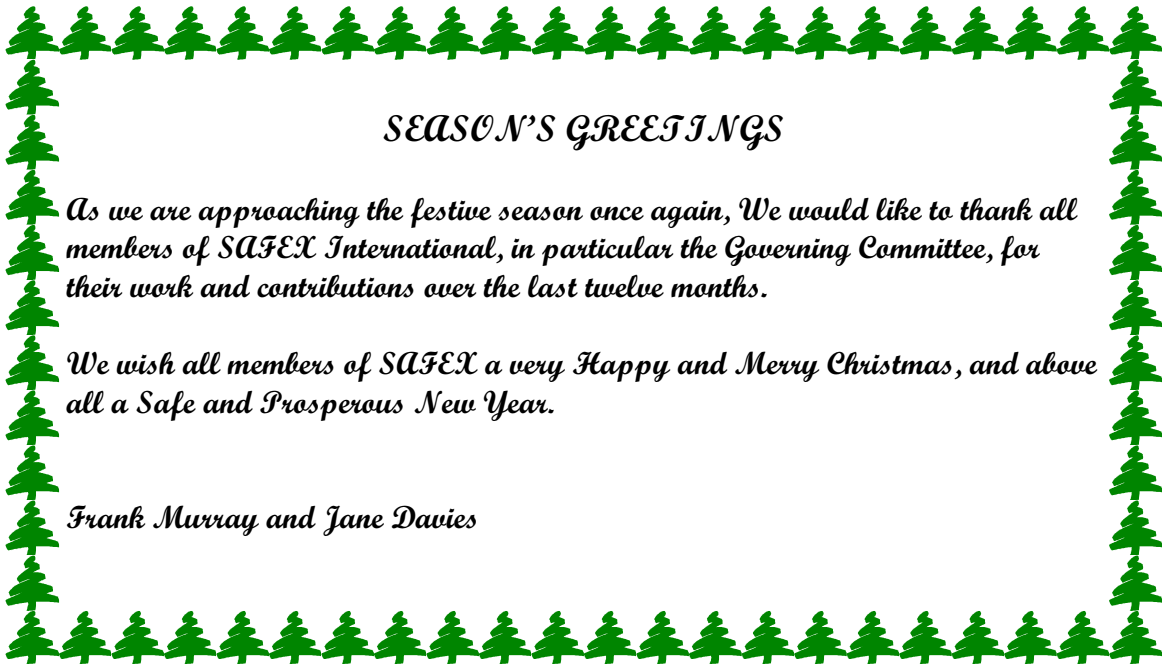
## SAFEX INTERNATIONAL WEB SITE

Along with every other organisation SAFEX International is now proud to announce the existence of a web site indicating the main features of our organisation.

Initially, this is a static web site, but ultimately it is anticipated that it will become a dynamic web site with updates of:

- Press reports of accidents
- Conference Organisation.
- Training Events.
- Constitutional Issues

In the meantime, please visit our web site at [www.safexinternational.com](http://www.safexinternational.com)



### *SEASON'S GREETINGS*

*As we are approaching the festive season once again, We would like to thank all members of SAFEX International, in particular the Governing Committee, for their work and contributions over the last twelve months.*

*We wish all members of SAFEX a very Happy and Merry Christmas, and above all a Safe and Prosperous New Year.*

*Frank Murray and Jane Davies*

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