

Book Review by Ron Willey*

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25 Years Later: The largest industrial disasters with hazardous material

By ir. C.M. Pietersen, Published by Gelling Publishing Co. PO Box 249, 2910 AE Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, The Netherlands. ISBN 978-90-78440-42-0. English version available on as a pdf at www.safety-sc.com/en.

This title presents an in-depth analysis of two 1984 disasters: the LPG explosions (BLEVES) that occurred near Mexico City, and the Bhopal, India MIC gas release. The author, Chris Pietersen, was the project manager at TNO (The Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research) who led independent investigations of both events partially funded by the Dutch government. The author writes in the opening "Who is interested in a book about these old disasters? My reply is anyone who works in the process safety field. The underlying root causes of these accidents trace back to underlying cause of many accidents that have followed. Walt Howard summarized these as "Management decisions." More broadly, the author writes that "these disasters occurred because large companies and governments did not follow the principles of safety." The author has significant experience in the investigation of serious incidents. He writes that "It is sometimes as if time has stood still since 1984. ... Unfortunately, all of these [safety] systems are not effective if management is not alert enough. ..Prevention of victims of course, but also focus on victims after the event. That is an important responsibility that must be taken seriously." The author discusses industrial safety 25 years later and what have we learned after these two events. What then follows are 10 short appendices that cover a wide range of topics from definition of BLEVES, to HAZOPs, to a reviews of a number of recent incidents that have parallel situations similar to the two 1984 disasters. I recommend the book to any process safety supervisor or entry level engineer entering the process safety community.

Ron Willey, Sept 2, 2010

*** About Dr. Ronald J. Willey**

Dr. Ronald J. Willey is a Professor of Chemical Engineering at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. He is an active member of SACHE (Safety and Chemical Engineering Education), a group dedicated to integrating principles of Process Safety into undergraduate Chemical Engineering education. He is the author of over 80 technical papers and over 10 SACHE products, including a product devoted to the Properties of Materials.

Dr. Willey is a registered Professional Engineer in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and is presently the Vice Chair of the Board of Registration for Engineers and Land Surveyors for the Commonwealth. He also serves as a co-editor of the quarterly publication, "Process Safety Progress."