

US EPA Release: September 10, 2009

U.S. EPA fines Central California company \$21,086 for ammonia release notification violation

SAN FRANCISCO - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today fined Turlock Cold Storage \$21,086 for failing to properly notify emergency responders of an ammonia release, a violation of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know-Act.

After an equipment failure in February, Turlock Cold Storage released more than 1,000 pounds of ammonia -- triggering the requirement that the company immediately notify the proper authorities to ensure an appropriate response.

“Facilities using hazardous chemicals need to understand the importance of providing timely and accurate information to the appropriate local, state, and federal officials,” said Daniel Meer, assistant director for the Pacific Southwest Region’s Superfund program. “Without this information, emergency responders cannot adequately protect themselves and our communities in the event of a chemical release.”

The company, located at 107 South Kilroy, did immediately contact the Turlock Fire Department, but failed to notify the National Response Center and the California Office of the Emergency Services.

The refrigerated storage facility has since corrected the violations and changed notification procedures to ensure that future accidental releases would be immediately reported.

Exposure to high concentrations of ammonia causes immediate burning of the eyes, nose, throat and respiratory tract. In severe cases, it can result in blindness, lung damage, or death.

Federal law requires that when facilities have a release of a reportable quantity of a hazardous chemical, owners or operators immediately notify local, state and federal agencies. Immediate notification allows emergency response teams an opportunity to evaluate the scope of the response needed to prevent exposure and to minimize impacts on public health and the environment.

Also, the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know-Act requires all facilities using hazardous substances above specified quantities to provide chemical hazard information and annual chemical inventory information to state and local emergency planners and fire departments for inclusion in the community emergency plan.