

## CITGO EAST REFINERY ON OSHA RADAR AFTER COMPLAINTS OF SAFETY IRREGULARITIES



A complaint of safety and health hazards coupled with leakage of toxic hydrofluoric acid, at the Citgo East Refinery in Corpus Christi has brought OSHA – The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, investigators back to the location, they have had reasons to examine before. OSHA was looking into a complaint alleging that there were several safety and health hazards for the company's employees. The complaints list nine potential safety hazards that could compromise on workers safety and put their health and lives in jeopardy. Prime amongst the complaints is that the additives that the workers use whilst converting crude oil into other products, is suspected to be carcinogenic and causes breathing problems. The complainant adds "This toxic mix clings to work clothing, and there are no facilities for East Plant 2 employees to shower or change clothes before leaving the work area." It is further alleged that the management does not mend the alkylation unit's equipment, which is taking a toll on the workers and the equipment. "Employees working in the units are tasked with many duties exposing the employees to possible errors due to shortage in staff," the complaint states. OSHA Area Director Michael Rivera said, that these and several other factors caused the safety agency to conduct an inspection. Citgo has declined to make any comment; however, its spokesman said in a statement that "At the conclusion of the investigation, we will at that time provide information on the findings." Another reason why OSHA was worried about the safety standards at Citgo, was the release of hazardous chemicals on the night of Monday. A company spokesman confirmed that an unconfirmed chemical had indeed been released. Thankfully however, its release sparked off sensors that activated giant sprinklers that created a "water curtain" around the chemical and prevented it from escaping outside the plant. Over the last ten years, OSHA has found Citgo guilty of more than sixty-five safety violations. A majority of them have been for failure to handle toxic and flammable substances as per expected safety norms and standards. In one of its more serious transgressions, in July 2009, an explosion rocked the refinery, seriously injuring a worker and unleashing a chemical that had the capability to maim, sicken and even kill. Citgo has a history of being found guilty of and being fined for safety violations and the complainant alleges that the company's lack of adequate maintenance of its equipment and disregard for safety precautions, poses a constant danger not only to the company's employees but also to the local community. Last Monday's leakage may not have had any major consequences and nobody was hurt, but could be an indicator that a major catastrophe could be just around the bend.

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