

**U.S. Chemical Safety and  
Hazard Investigation Board**

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Hon. John S. Bresland  
Chairman and CEO

Hon. William B. Wark  
Board Member

Hon. William E. Wright  
Board Member



January 13, 2010

VIA EMAIL AND FEDEX

Dr. Lawrence Schovanec  
Interim Dean  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Box 41034  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock, TX 79409-1034

Dear Dr. Schovanec:

As you know, on January 7, 2010, a serious chemical accident occurred in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Texas Tech University. As we understand, the accident involved the detonation of a sample of a hazardous, unstable metal compound. The detonation resulted in severe and possibly permanent injuries to a chemistry graduate student, who remains hospitalized, as well as significant property damage.

The federal Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. section 7412(r)(6), directs the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) to investigate the facts, conditions, and circumstances relating to chemical accidents and to issue public reports detailing the causes. For several years, the CSB has been concerned by the apparent frequency and severity of accidents occurring in educational and research laboratories. Accordingly we have decided to conduct an investigation of the January 7<sup>th</sup> accident at Texas Tech University.

The CSB is a non-regulatory, independent federal agency; reports of the Board do not result in fines or sanctions against any party, and Board findings are inadmissible in civil suits for damages. Our reports do result in safety recommendations designed to make chemical production, processing, handling, and storage as safe and free from the risk of injury as possible.

To conduct the Board's work, Congress authorized the Board to enter any property where an accidental release has resulted in a fatality, serious injury, or substantial property damage and do all things necessary for a proper investigation. Board investigators may inspect records, files, papers, processes, controls, and facilities and

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collect relevant samples. The Board may conduct hearings, issue subpoenas, and require testimony from witnesses. Outreach and education are also an important part of the CSB's work, and we seek to achieve widespread dissemination of our safety findings and recommendations in order to avoid future accidents. More detailed information about the Board is available from our website, [CSB.gov](http://CSB.gov).

The investigation will be conducted from the CSB's Western Regional Office in Denver, Colorado. CSB Investigations Supervisor Don Holmstrom will lead the investigation. CSB Investigator Dr. Mary Beth Mulcahy and other investigators will also be integrally involved. Mr. Holmstrom, Dr. Mulcahy, and other investigators have been provided with notices of inspection authority and rights of entry to the accident site.

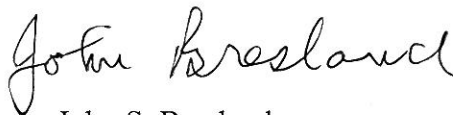
We anticipate the initial phase of the investigation will focus on collection of relevant documents, including chemical hazard information, laboratory notes, photographs, safety procedures, training records, and grant and contracting documents. Depending upon the results of the initial phase, CSB investigators may conduct witness interviews and inspect the accident site in February.

As noted in your strategic plan for Environment, Health, and Safety, the University has a goal of a "healthy, safe and environmentally sound community." That is a goal we share at the Chemical Safety Board, and in that spirit I ask that you and other members of the University faculty and staff provide full and prompt cooperation to Mr. Holmstrom and his team.

Under separate cover, we will shortly be transmitting other materials, including a document request, interrogatories, and a notice to preserve evidence.

If you have any questions, please contact Investigations Supervisor Holmstrom directly at (303) 236-8701. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,



John S. Bresland  
Chairman & CEO

Cc: Ronald Phillips, University Counsel  
Dr. Taylor Eighmy, Vice President for Research  
Randy Nix, Director of Environmental Health & Safety  
Guy Bailey, President  
Bob Smith, Provost  
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Dr. Naz Karim, Chairman, Dept. of Chemical Engineering

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