

NEWS RELEASE

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Cal/OSHA Cites ExxonMobil \$566,600 for Torrance Refinery Explosion

Los Angeles—Cal/OSHA today issued [19 citations](#) to ExxonMobil Refining & Supply Company for workplace safety and health violations following an investigation into the February 18 explosion at the company's Torrance refinery that injured four workers. The proposed penalties total \$566,600.

Eighteen of the citations were classified as serious due to a realistic possibility of worker death or serious injury. Six of these serious violations were also classified as willful because Cal/OSHA found that Exxon did not take action to eliminate known hazardous conditions at the refinery and intentionally failed to comply with state safety standards. ExxonMobil has 15 working days to appeal the citations to the Occupational Safety and Health Appeals Board.

"Petroleum refineries have the responsibility to keep workers safe, and to also protect nearby communities and the environment," said Christine Baker, Director of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). "This investigation revealed severe lapses in Exxon's safety protocols." Cal/OSHA is a division of DIR.

The blast on February 18 was the result of a hydrocarbon release from the refinery's fluid catalytic cracker (FCC) unit into its electrostatic precipitator (ESP). The hydrocarbons ignited inside the ESP, causing the unit to explode. Eight workers were decontaminated after the incident, and four were sent to hospitals for treatment of minor injuries. Cal/OSHA's investigation concluded the following:

- A 2007 safety review uncovered concerns about flammable vapor leakage in the ESP. Management knew of potential fire or explosion hazards as a result of the leakage, and failed to correct the danger.
- Exxon's incident response team, which included ExxonMobil senior management, was aware of a leaking spent slide valve on the FCC unit before the accident occurred.

- The FCC unit had not been working properly for as many as nine years prior to the incident. There was no functional pressure transmitter and as a result, ExxonMobil was unable to monitor hydrocarbon pressure buildup in the unit.
- There was no written operating procedure for placing the FCC unit in hot standby, which is a state between startup and shutdown that can be compared to working on an idling car.

Cal/OSHA issued an order prohibiting use of the FCC unit on February 18, and that order remains in effect until ExxonMobil can demonstrate that the unit is safe to operate.

Cal/OSHA has investigated ExxonMobil's Torrance facility twice in the last five years for accident-related incidents that resulted in serious workplace injuries in 2011. On March 29, 2011, a refinery operator was working on the FCC unit, attempting to shut down a failed pump when a motor in the pump suffered mechanical failure and exploded. The worker suffered a fractured jaw and lost six teeth in the accident. The other accident in September 2011 did not occur in the FCC unit. Cal/OSHA issued three serious and five general citations in those cases.

Both the February 18 explosion and the August 6, 2012 [Chevron refinery fire](#) in Richmond have led to [proposed improvements](#) in petroleum refinery regulation. The proposed changes include damage mechanism reviews (DMRs), employee participation, safeguard protection analysis and hazard control analysis.

"Cal/OSHA is working closely with other members of the Governor's Interagency Refinery Task Force toward more protective refinery safety regulations," said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. "Improved regulations and coordinated interagency inspections will reduce risks that can lead to serious accidents."

The [Governor's Interagency Refinery Task Force](#) was formed in the aftermath of the 2012 Chevron refinery fire, and includes participants from 13 agencies and departments.

Cal/OSHA's [Process Safety Management Unit](#) is responsible for inspecting refineries and chemical plants that handle large quantities of toxic and flammable materials. Health and safety standards enforced by the PSM Unit, including adequate employee training, are intended to prevent catastrophic explosions, fires and releases of dangerous chemicals.

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers and employee organizations to improve their

health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

Members of the press may contact Erika Monterroza or Peter Melton at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to [subscribe to get email alerts](#) on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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