

Statement on Refinery Safety from the Tesoro Council – March 14, 2014
Tesoro Council Meeting

In light of the recent incidents at refineries owned by Tesoro, we the Tesoro Council, which represents workers at Tesoro facilities all across the United States, including refineries and pipelines, condemn Tesoro for its inadequate safety culture and call on Tesoro to improve safety at its facilities before even more catastrophic incidents occur which threaten workers, the community and property.

At the Tesoro refinery in Anacortes, WA, a heat exchanger catastrophically ruptured on April 2, 2010 causing the release of highly flammable hydrogen and naptha, which then ignited creating an explosion and fire which resulted in the death of seven employees. The incident was investigated by the Chemical Safety Board (CSB) which determined that the cause was a heat exchanger, which had been weakened over time due to the exposure to hydrogen at high temperatures and pressure. The CSB recommended the use of inherently safer design, such as replacing the heat exchanger with one made of materials that can withstand the operating conditions significantly better than the one that failed. Additionally, the CSB noted that Tesoro has a safety culture which normalizes occurrences of hazardous conditions and which included the use of additional operators to deal with these conditions, but which ultimately put them in harm's way.

On February 12, 2014, two employees at the Tesoro Golden Eagle refinery in Martinez, CA underwent first and second degree chemical burns when they were splashed with sulfuric acid in the alkylation unit. In an unprecedented move, CALOSHA ordered the shutdown of the unit from February 18th to 28th. Tesoro refused to allow the CSB to return to the site and did not allow the CSB to preserve the site for investigation or conduct investigatory interviews. The CSB's preliminary findings concluded that the cause was mechanical integrity failure from equipment connected to a vessel containing sulfuric acid. Additionally, the CSB investigation determined that the incidence of operators being splashed by acid and caustic substances occurred somewhat commonly; workers were not provided with protective equipment, such as face shields; and workers were reluctant to report safety concerns due to fear over their jobs.

These two incidents point to an ongoing problem within the company's culture as regards safety for its workers and neighboring communities. As a major employer in the petrochemical industry, a position that has increased with Tesoro's recent acquisition of British Petroleum's Southern California refinery and logistics assets, it is incumbent upon Tesoro to be the leader in safety in an industry that is inherently dangerous by its nature. We call on Tesoro to follow the recommendations of the CSB and make the necessary improvements and changes in process and procedure in order to minimize risk and improve safety.