

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 26, 2018

Acting Executive Officer and Members
United States Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board
1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 910
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Board:

The Husky Superior Refinery accident on April 26, 2018 raises serious questions about the safety of U.S. refineries using hydrogen fluoride (HF), and about the need for safety improvements to reduce the risk of explosions during refinery turnarounds. As the Board investigates this major incident, which closely follows another major HF “near-miss” disaster in Torrance, California, we request that the Board hold an interim public meeting in early Fall 2018 in the Twin Ports of Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin, which includes the Husky Superior Refinery.

As you know, the Husky Superior Refinery was severely damaged in a catastrophic accident on April 26, 2018, which the Board is investigating. It involved numerous explosions and fires, necessitating a 10-mile evacuation zone to the South and 3-mile evacuation zones to East and West, in recognition of potential chemical impacts to citizens far into Superior and Duluth. Had Twin Ports residents been fully informed about the risk from the HF stored at the refinery prior to the incident, it is likely that emergency evacuations would have been implemented more urgently.

We are aware that the Board released a Factual Review with interim findings on August 2 on root causes found in its ongoing Husky Refinery investigation. As the Board investigation continues, our request for a full public meeting would allow input from the refinery communities about the scope of the Board’s investigation of the Husky Refinery accident. It would also provide an opportunity for public dialogue explaining the Board’s stated grave concerns about the use of HF in urban oil refineries.

The Board most recently outlined the Torrance Refinery’s “near-miss” HF tank disaster in its 2017 final investigation report on the causes of the 2015 Exxon Mobil Torrance, California refinery explosion and fire. The Board suggested that the systemic problems underlying the Torrance Refinery accident are likely to exist throughout the petrochemical industry. It is our understanding that Exxon Mobil management has so far denied the Board access to essential HF process risk information.

Immediately following the April 26, 2018 accident, both Twin Ports mayors, Mayor Larson of Duluth, Minnesota and Mayor Paine of Superior Wisconsin, wrote letters to the Husky Superior Refinery strongly urging conversion to an available non-disaster catalyst when it rebuilds the Refinery. Minnesota and Wisconsin media have reported extensively on the accident, and concerned community members have spoken in public meetings about the near-disaster at Husky regarding the HF storage tank located only 150 feet from the ongoing explosions on April 26. Citizens, local leaders, and advocacy groups have called for the use of less dangerous turnaround protocols and have voiced concerns about the serious threats to their families and communities posed by HF being used at the site. Concerned Minnesota state officials are reviewing the adequacy of state disaster prevention regulations related to this extremely volatile chemical compound.

Hydrogen fluoride poses a great public risk to the Twin Ports metropolitan area. Workers, residents and local officials deserve the opportunity to participate in an interim public meeting to provide input into the Husky Refinery investigatory process. We urge you to engage the local community to share the Board's interim findings regarding the Husky Superior Refinery incident and to discuss any systemic concerns that the Board has with the use of HF in the petrochemical industry.

We deeply appreciate the Chemical Safety Board for its vigilant work to address the risks posed by the use of HF and other chemicals at U.S. refineries. We look forward to your response to our request.

Sincerely,



BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress



TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



RICHARD M. NOLAN
Member of Congress



TINA SMITH
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar

AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator