

Daily Environment

REPORT

Toxic Substances:

EPA, Fertilizer Institute Announce Guidance On Managing Risk From Ammonia Fertilizers

The Environmental Protection Agency said Aug. 20 it has worked with the Fertilizer Institute to develop a web-based compliance assistance tool for agricultural fertilizer retailers.

All fertilizer facilities that handle, process, or store anhydrous ammonia above a threshold quantity of 10,000 pounds are subject to safety requirements within EPA's Risk Management Program (RMP).

EPA said the web-based tool will assist agricultural facilities with RMP requirements and help to protect human health and the environment by preventing accidents.

According to EPA, the materials provide practical advice, insights, and guidelines for better understanding the RMP and its implementation, particularly as it applies to facilities in the retail ammonia fertilizer industry.

The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) said Aug. 14 it developed the web-based myRMP program cooperatively the Asmark Institute, and that it is designed to help agricultural retailers conduct required updates to their risk management plans.

Retailers were first required to be in compliance with the RMP by June 21, 1999. EPA said it has started facility inspections and enforcement of the RMP, whose five components include a hazard assessment, management system, accident prevention program, emergency response program, and risk management plan.

Updates Required Every Five Years

A complete review and update must be conducted every five years or whenever certain changes in the facility operation occur. The next five-year update will occur in June 2009, when it is expected that practically every U.S. retailer will access the new guidance for assistance with EPA's requirements, TFI said.

EPA requires companies that use certain flammable and toxic substances to develop a Risk Management Program to reduce chemical risk at the local level. The information

helps local fire, police, and emergency response personnel and is useful to citizens in understanding the chemical hazards in communities, according to the agency.

The list of regulated substances and their threshold quantities is contained in Section 112(r) of the Clean Air Act is found in 40 C.F.R., Part 68. The agency has developed a suite of software applications to allow facilities to submit their RMPs in electronic format.

The RMP exempts ammonia when held by farmers for use on a farm under their control. The exemption does not apply to agricultural suppliers or fertilizer manufacturers.

In announcing the new guidance, John Askew, EPA Region 7 administrator, said, "These materials outline an approach to compliance that will be very helpful to fertilizer facilities covered by the Risk Management Program. This is an effective user-friendly tool for nearly 2,000 facilities in Region 7 that handle anhydrous ammonia."

EPA Region 7--which covers the states of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska--receives more accidental release reports for ammonia than any other chemical, according to the agency. In addition to releases caused by transportation accidents, human error, and equipment failure, a number have been caused by anhydrous ammonia thefts.

Ammonia is a key ingredient in the illegal production of methamphetamine. When stolen, the toxic gas can be unintentionally released, causing injuries to emergency responders, law enforcement personnel, and the public, EPA said.

TFI President Ford B. West said, "The guidance will work to provide for more uniformity and consistency across the different regions of EPA."
